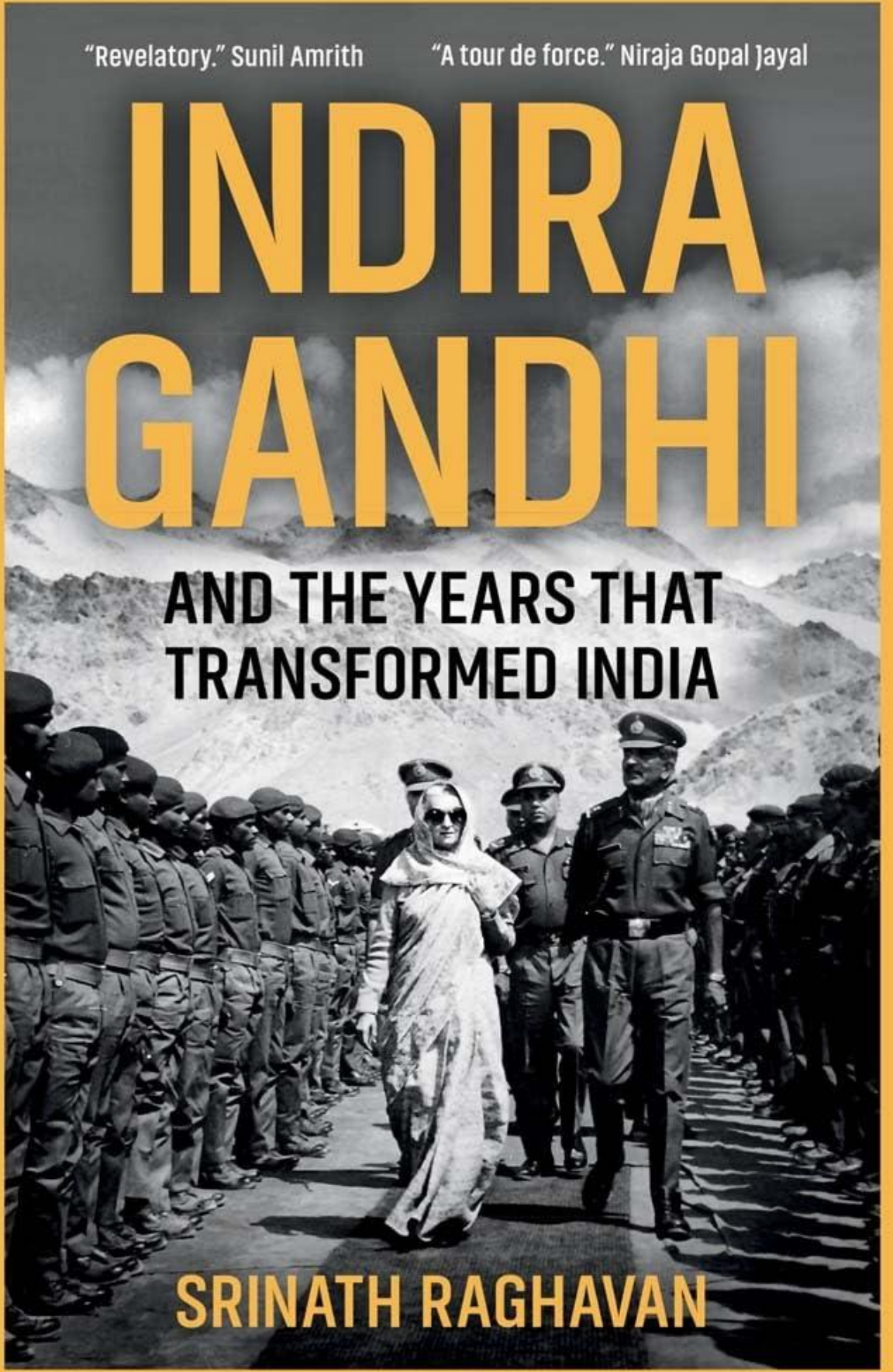
"Revelatory." Sunil Amrith "A tour de force." Niraja Gopal Jayal

INDIRA GANDHI

AND THE YEARS THAT TRANSFORMED INDIA



SRINATH RAGHAVAN

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INDIRA GANDHI AND THE YEARS THAT TRANSFORMED INDIA

To Latha Sampath & Usha Venkatesh
and
Geetha Raghavan – In Memory

INDIRA GANDHI
AND THE YEARS THAT TRANSFORMED INDIA

SRINATH RAGHAVAN

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ABBREVIATIONS

AASU	All Assam Students' Union
ABVP	Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad
AGSP	Asom Gana Sangram Parishad
AIADMK	All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
AICC	All India Congress Committee
AIRF	All India Railwaymen's Federation
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BKD	Bharatiya Kranti Dal
BLD	Bharatiya Lok Dal
CBI	Central Bureau of Investigation
CFD	Congress for Democracy
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
COFEPOSA	Conservation of Foreign Exchange and Prevention of Smuggling Activities Act, 1974
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI (M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CRR	Cash Reserve Ratio
CSS	Chhatra Sangharsh Samiti
CWC	Congress Working Committee
DDA	Delhi Development Authority
DMK	Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
IMF	International Monetary Fund

IUD	intra-uterine device
LSS	Lok Sangharsh Samiti
MISA	Maintenance of Internal Security Act, 1971
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MP	member of parliament
MRTP	Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act, 1969
NAI	National Archives of India
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
PAC	Provincial Armed Constabulary
PM	prime minister
PMML	Prime Ministers' Museum & Library
PMS	prime minister's secretariat
RBI	Reserve Bank of India
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SLR	Statutory Liquidity Ratio
SSP	Samyukta Socialist Party
SVD	Samyukta Vidhayak Dal
TNA	The National Archives
UP	Uttar Pradesh

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Abdullah, Farooq	Chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir, 1982–84.
Abdullah, Sheikh	Premier of Jammu and Kashmir, 1948–53; chief minister of the state, 1975–82.
Advani, L.K.	Jana Sangh leader and MP; union minister of information and broadcasting, 1977–79.
Ahmad, Tajuddin	Prime minister of the Bangladesh government-in-exile, 1971.
Ahmed, Fakhruddin Ali	President of India, 1974–77.
Alexander, P.C.	Principal secretary to Indira Gandhi, 1980–84.
Antulay, A.R.	Congress legislator and MP; chief minister of Maharashtra, 1980–82.
Bahuguna, H.N.	Chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, 1973–75; union minister of finance, July–October 1979.
Barooah, D.K.	President of Congress (R), 1975–78.
Beg, M.H.	Chief justice of India, 1977–78.
Beg, Mirza Afzal	Close associate of Sheikh Abdullah; founder of Plebiscite Front, 1955; negotiator of the Kashmir Accord, 1975.

Bhagwati, P.N.	Supreme court judge, 1973–85; chief justice of India, 1985–86.
Bhindranwale, Jarnail Singh	Militant Sikh preacher and leader.
Bhushan, Shanti	Lawyer and union minister of law and justice, 1977–79.
Chandrachud, Y.V.	Chief justice of India, 1978–85.
Chandrasekhar, Sripati	Demographer and family planning specialist; union minister of health and family planning, 1967.
Chavan, Y.B.	Minister of defense, 1962–66; held several cabinet portfolios under Indira Gandhi, 1966–77; deputy prime minister and home minister under Charan Singh, 1979–80.
Deoras, Balasaheb	Head of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 1973–94.
Desai, Morarji	Union minister of finance, 1958–63, 1966–69; deputy prime minister, 1967–69; stayed with Congress (O) after the party split; prime minister of India, 1977–79.
Deshmukh, Nana	Leader of the Jana Sangh; played a key role in Jayaprakash Narayan's movement, 1974–75.
Dhar, D.P.	Ambassador to the Soviet Union, 1969–71; minister of planning, 1972–74.
Dhar, P.N.	Economist; secretary and principal secretary to Indira Gandhi, 1971–77.
Dharia, Mohan	Socialist "Young Turk"; minister of state for planning, 1971–74; imprisoned during the Emergency.
Fernandes, George	Socialist politician and trade union leader; led the railway strike of 1974; union minister of industries, 1977–79.
Fotedar, M.L.	Political secretary to Indira Gandhi.
Gandhi, Indira	Prime minister of India, 1966–77, 1980–84.

Gandhi, Rajiv	Elder son of Indira Gandhi; MP, 1981–84; prime minister of India, 1984–89.
Gandhi, Sanjay	Younger son of Indira Gandhi; founder of Maruti Motors; leader of Youth Congress; MP, January–June 1980.
Giri, V.V.	Vice president of India, 1967–69; president of India, 1969–74.
Gokhale, H.R.	Union minister of law and justice, 1975–77.
Gromyko, Andrei	Foreign minister of the Soviet Union, 1957–85.
Gupta, C.B.	Chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, 1960–63, March–April 1967, 1969–70.
Haksar, P.N.	Secretary and principal secretary to Indira Gandhi, 1967–73; deputy chairman of the Planning Commission, 1975–77.
Hazari, R.K.	Economist, consultant to Planning Commission; head of the committee on industrial planning and licensing policy, 1966–67.
Husain, Zakir	President of India, 1967–69.
Iyer, V.R. Krishna	Supreme court judge, 1973–80.
Jagannathan, S.	Governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), 1970–75.
Jethmalani, Ram	Lawyer; Janata Party MP, 1977–80.
Jha, L.K.	Secretary to Indira Gandhi, 1966–67; governor of the RBI, 1967–70; ambassador to the United States, 1970–73.
Johnson, Lyndon	President of the United States, 1963–69.
Kamaraj, K.	Chief minister of Tamil Nadu, 1954–63; president of the Indian National Congress, 1964–67; president of Congress (O).
Kant, Krishan	Socialist "Young Turk"; MP, 1966–80; Vice president of India, 1997–2002.
Kao, R.N.	Chief of the Research & Analysis Wing (external intelligence agency), 1968–77.
Karunanidhi, M.	Chief minister of Tamil Nadu, 1969–76.

Kaul, T.N.	Foreign secretary, 1968–72; ambassador to the United States, 1973–76.
Khan, General Yahya	Chief of the Pakistan army and the martial law authority, 1969–71.
Khanna, H.R.	Supreme court judge, 1971–77.
Kissinger, Henry	National security advisor to US President Richard Nixon, 1969–73.
Kumaramangalam, Mohan	Union minister of iron and steel mines, 1971–73.
Lal, Bansi	Chief minister of Haryana, 1968–75; minister of defense, 1975–77.
Lal, Devi	Chief minister of Haryana, 1977–79.
Limaye, Madhu	Socialist politician and leader of the Janata Party; MP, 1964–71, 1973–79.
Mahalanobis, P.C.	Statistician, member of the Planning Commission, 1955–67.
Malhotra, Jagmohan	Vice chairman of the Delhi Development Authority during the Emergency; lieutenant governor of Delhi, 1980–81, 1982–84; governor of Jammu and Kashmir, 1984–89.
Manekshaw, General Sam	Chief of the army staff, 1969–73.
Mehta, Asoka	Socialist politician; joined Indian National Congress in 1964; after the Congress split in 1969, stayed with Congress (O).
Minhas, B.S.	Economist, member of the Planning Commission, 1971–73.
Mishra, D.P.	Chief minister of Madhya Pradesh, 1963–67.
Mitra, Ashok	Chief economic advisor to Government of India, 1970–72.
Mitra, Asok	Economist; senior bureaucrat; secretary to the Planning Commission, 1970–73.
Mukherjee, Pranab	MP, Rajya Sabha, 1969–81; minister of state for revenue, 1973–77; minister of finance, 1982–84; president of India, 2012–17.

Nanda, Gulzarilal	Union minister of home affairs, 1963–66; acting prime minister of India for two 13-day tenures in 1964 and 1966.
Narain, Raj	Socialist politician; fought election and filed suit against Indira Gandhi in 1971; defeated Indira Gandhi in Rae Bareli in 1977; union minister of health and family welfare, 1977–78.
Narayan, Jayaprakash	Socialist leader; founded the Janata Party in 1977.
Nehru, B.K.	Indira Gandhi's cousin; senior bureaucrat and diplomat; high commissioner to London, 1973–77; governor of Jammu and Kashmir, 1981–84.
Nijalingappa, S.	Chief minister of Mysore State (Karnataka), 1962–68; last president of the undivided Congress party, 1968–69.
Nixon, Richard	President of the United States of America, 1969–74.
Palkhivala, Nani	Eminent lawyer; appeared against the government in important constitutional cases and for Indira Gandhi in her appeal to the supreme court on her election case in June 1975.
Pant, Pitambar	Head of the perspective planning division in the Planning Commission, 1958–70.
Parthasarathi, G.	Diplomat, advisor to Indira Gandhi; negotiator of the Kashmir Accord, 1975.
Patel, Chiman	Chief minister of Gujarat, 1973–74.
Patel, I.G.	Chief economic advisor to the Government of India, 1965–67; secretary department of economic affairs, 1968–72; governor of the RBI, 1977–82.
Patnaik, Biju	Chief minister of Orissa, 1961–63; union minister of steel, mines, and coals, 1979–80.

Prasad, H.Y. Sharada	Press information advisor and speech writer to Indira Gandhi, 1967–77, 1980–84.
Radhakrishnan, Sarvepalli	Philosopher; president of India, 1962–67.
Rahman, Mujibur	Leader of Awami League in East Pakistan; prime minister and president of Bangladesh, 1972–75.
Ram, Jagjivan	First president of Congress (R); held several important cabinet portfolios under Indira Gandhi, 1967–77; founded Congress for Democracy (CFD) in 1977; minister of defense, 1977–79; deputy prime minister, 1979.
Rao, K. Subba	Chief justice of India, 1966–67; contested election for president of India as opposition candidate, 1967.
Rao, N.T. Rama	Founder of Telugu Desam Party, 1982; Chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, 1984–89.
Rao, P.V. Narasimha	chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, 1971–73; union minister of external affairs, 1980–84; minister of home affairs, July–December 1984; prime minister of India, 1991–96.
Ray, A.N.	Chief justice of India, 1973–77.
Ray, Siddhartha Shankar	chief minister of West Bengal, 1972–77; advisor to Indira Gandhi.
Reddy, Brahmananda	Union minister of home affairs, 1974–77.
Reddy, N. Sanjiva	Chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, 1962–64; speaker of Lok Sabha, 1967–69; president of India, 1977–82.
Sethi, P.C.	Union minister of home affairs, 1982–84.
Shankar, P. Shiv	Union minister of law and justice, 1980–82.
Shekhar, Chandra	Socialist "Young Turk"; Congress MP, 1968–77; imprisoned during the Emergency; president of Janata Party, 1977–88; prime minister of India, November 1990–June 1991.

Singh, Charan	Congress minister in Uttar Pradesh; founder of Bharatiya Kranti Dal (later Lok Dal) in 1967; chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, 1970; union minister of home affairs, 1977–78; minister of finance, 1978–79; prime minister of India, July–August 1979.
Singh, Karan	Sadr-i-Riyasat and governor of Jammu and Kashmir, 1952–67; union minister of tourism and civil aviation, 1967–73; union minister for health and family planning, 1973–77; union minister of education and culture under Charan Singh, 1979–80.
Singh, Swaran	Minister of external affairs, 1964–66, 1970–74; minister of defense, 1966–70, 1974–75.
Singh, Zail	Chief minister of Punjab, 1972–77; union minister of home affairs, 1980–82; president of India, 1982–87.
Subramaniam, C.	Union minister of food and agriculture, 1964–66; minister of planning, 1971–72; minister of food and public distribution, 1971–74; minister of finance, 1975–77; minister of defense, 1979–80.
Thakur, Karpoori	Socialist politician; chief minister of Bihar, 1970–71, 1977–79.
Tripathi, Kamalapati	Chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, 1971–73; minister of railways, January–November 1980.
Urs, Devraj	Chief minister of Karnataka, 1972–77, 1978–80.
Vajpayee, A.B.	Leader of the Jana Sangh, 1957–77; minister of external affairs, 1977–79; prime minister of India, 1996 and 1998–2004.
Venkataraman, R.	Union minister of finance, 1980–82; minister of defense, 1982–84; president of India, 1987–92.

PROLOGUE

Crisis of the Old Order

> The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born.
>
> Antonio Gramsci, c.1930

The telephone rang at 1.30 a.m. on 11 January 1966. Indira Gandhi's secretary was calling to inform her that the prime minister had died in Tashkent half an hour ago. He also told her that the home minister and second-ranking member of the cabinet, Gulzarilal Nanda, had been informed and had made straight for the residence of the president of India. Indira Gandhi immediately left for the presidential house atop Raisina Hill. She was, after all, ranked fourth in the cabinet, though she held the relatively minor ministry of information and broadcasting. She and the recently appointed finance minister were the only ones present when President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan swore in Nanda as acting prime minister at 3.15 a.m.[1]

Lal Bahadur Shastri had been in office for barely twenty months. Succeeding Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, who had held the office for seventeen years, had been a tall order. However, the diminutive and self-effacing Shastri had come into his own during his brief tenure—not least in the war against Pakistan in August–September 1965. Shastri had gone to Tashkent for a postwar conference with the president of Pakistan hosted by the Soviet Union. Hours after inking the treaty, he had died.

On returning home, Indira Gandhi lost no time in canvassing opinion and crafting support for her bid for the premiership. Soon she was back with the president, ostensibly seeking his advice on whether to announce her candidature. Indira Gandhi neither held a major cabinet portfolio nor possessed substantial experience in government. And yet she was well aware of her unique standing in her party, the Indian National Congress. After all, she was the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru. After the latter's demise in May 1964, she had been urged by some congressmen to consider succeeding her father. Overwrought with grief and unsure of her own position, she had resolutely refused these entreaties. Now she was keen. President Radhakrishnan had had a long and close association with Nehru, hence Indira Gandhi sought to ensure his support. Unmindful of the proprieties of his high constitutional office, Radhakrishnan assured her, "I am for your being prime minister. We will all help you."[2]

In the coming days, her passage to power was greased by the party's bosses and elder statesmen. Her principal qualification, from their perspective, was the gilded genetic pool from which she was pulled. They also assumed that she was the most pliable of potential candidates. On the morning of 19 January 1966, the Congress Parliamentary Party met to choose the new prime minister. Five hundred and twenty-six Congress members of parliament cast a secret ballot—a process that took over four hours. After the votes were counted, the party's chief whip appeared in public to announce the result. From the large crowd gathered round the central hall of parliament an impatient voice rang out: "What is it, boy or girl?" "It's a girl," came the reply—and the gathering erupted in approval.[3] India had its youngest and its first woman prime minister.

***

For all the acclamation that greeted her ascent, Indira Gandhi knew that she was taking the levers of the state at a remarkably difficult time. In the past four years, India had fought two wars and faced two consecutive years of harsh drought—all of which had thrown the economy off-kilter. The country trembled at the edge of famine. Hunger marches broke out like a rash across the land. The old political order constructed by her father's generation was visibly crumbling.

That order was inaugurated under most unpropitious circumstances. India's independence from colonial rule in August 1947 was accompanied by a partition of the country to create the Muslim state of Pakistan. The partition ignited a holocaust in which Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs turned on each other, leaving at least a million dead and many more millions displaced between the two new countries. India and Pakistan were soon at war over rival claims to the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir—a conflict that would prove a running sore in the subcontinent. Kashmir was one of nearly 600 princely states, indirectly ruled by the British, whose future was uncertain at the moment of partition. Corralling and integrating the bulk of them into the new union of India required persuasion and inducements as well as sanctions and coercion—a mammoth task that was accomplished over a couple of years by Nehru's senior colleague and deputy prime minister, Vallabhbhai Patel.[4]

During these tumultuous years, the Congress leadership also stewarded the constituent assembly's efforts to craft a new constitution for independent India.[5] The document was drafted by a committee led by B.R. Ambedkar, the stalwart leader of the so-called "untouchable" castes and the most brilliant constitutional mind in an assembly awash with lawyers. Promulgated on 26 January 1950, the constitution ushered in a liberal, democratic, and republican political order. To a society cleaved by caste and class, gender and ethnicity, language and religion, it promised a set of fundamental rights—such as rights to equality, liberty, freedom of religion, culture, and education—enforceable by an independent judiciary helmed by the supreme court.

Rights were held out not only for individuals but also for certain groups. The caste system was, in Ambedkar's formulation, an intricate and ramified order of "graded inequality" where every *jati* or endogamous group regarded itself as superior to some and inferior to others. While these gradations were not immutable, this social system displayed remarkable continuity at its extremes, with the Brahmins sitting right on top and the formally excluded "untouchables" crushed down below. The constitution of India sought to do away with the most egregious manifestations of the caste system, such as untouchability, and to provide affirmative action by way of "reservations" in education and

public employment for these "scheduled castes." Similar provisions were made for the tribal communities that had remained outside the caste order.

The constitution catered for a capitalist economy with private ownership of property. Indeed, the right to property was not only guaranteed but elevated to the eminence of a fundamental right. Recognizing the destitution, deprivation, and disparities in Indian society, the constitution also set out "Directive Principles of State Policy"—provisions dealing with social and economic goals that the state should pursue, such as distributing ownership and control of material resources, ensuring livelihood, and reducing income inequality. Unlike the fundamental rights, though, the directive principles were not enforceable by the courts.

The constitution also established a democracy based on universal adult franchise. This was an extraordinary decision at a time when most Western democracies had yet to embrace the principle of universal suffrage. It was more striking still in a country with a huge population of 360 million and pathetically low literacy of 18 per cent. At one stroke, India became the world's largest democracy—if only in a formal sense. Geographically, too, India was a subcontinent-sized country: the seventh largest in the world. The constitution proclaimed India as "a union of states" with a union or central government in New Delhi and twenty-nine states with their own elected government (the number would change over time). The constitutional division of powers between the "center" and the states tilted towards the former, which controlled fiscal and monetary as well as military and emergency powers, while the states had control over agriculture, education, and the police.

The new republic adopted a modified version of the Westminster system. The parliament would consist of two houses: the Lok Sabha, or the House of the People, and the Rajya Sabha, or the Council of States. Elections to the Lok Sabha and the state legislatures were conducted on the first-past-the-post system—the British model dating to the Middle Ages—whereby the candidate with the largest number of votes (plurality) is elected irrespective of whether they have over half of all votes (majority). Members of the Rajya Sabha were indirectly elected by the members of the state legislatures. The republic had an elected president of India, whose constitutional role was akin to that of the

British monarch and who was chosen by an electoral college comprising all members of parliament and state legislatures.

In short, the Indian republic had embarked on fundamental social and economic transformation of a deeply hierarchical and impoverished country under conditions of electoral democracy.[6] There were no historical precedents for this simultaneous pursuit of various strands of modernity—processes that had unfolded sequentially and gradually in the West: centrality of the state in the social order, mass representative democracy, capitalist industrialization, social individuation, and secularization in politics and ethics.[7] The Nehru government's ambitions, almost risibly inflated, were reliant on two institutions: the postcolonial state and the Congress party.

The new Indian state was a Janus-faced institution. It carried the birthmark of its colonial ancestry in its administrative and coercive apparatuses and their attendant ideologies of paternalism and law and order. At the same time, this postcolonial state was also a developmental state. Indian nationalism had begun its career with a critique of colonial exploitation and the consequent immiseration of India. By the late 1930s, a specific form of development had commended itself to the party's leadership, especially its center-left faction that included Jawaharlal Nehru: planned economic development. The Second World War had compelled the colonial state to insinuate itself in the workings of the economy and planning for wartime production. By the end of the war, the idea of planned economic development had wide currency, including with leading Indian capitalists.[8]

After independence, the Nehru government established the Planning Commission—a body of economists, statisticians, and assorted experts, which had no constitutional sanction but came to play a central role in deciding developmental priorities and allocation of resources via its five-year plans.[9] The second plan, unveiled in 1955, aimed at achieving economic "self-sufficiency" by a strategy of import-substituting industrialization, focusing on heavy industries, and by the construction of a "mixed economy" in which the public sector would take the lead, with a subordinate and regulated role for the private sector. While channeling resources to industry from agriculture, the plan hoped that "community development" programs and cooperatives would ensure

adequate food production.[10] The ruling party was politically tied to landed interests, especially in the states—more anon—and hence unwilling and unable to push land reforms beyond a point. Thus, after an impressive acceleration of GDP growth rate—from less than 1 per cent in the five decades preceding independence to 4 per cent between 1950 and 1964—both industrial and agricultural growth ran into the sand by 1966. Meanwhile, the decennial census of 1961 showed population growth of 2.3 per cent, against the policymakers' expectation of 1.2 per cent, yanking down the per capita growth.[11]

What is more, in the attempted transition to industrial capitalism, the state effectively wrenched a huge section of the rural population from its ties to the land.[12] The limited land reforms did away with a plethora of older legal categories—tenants, sub-tenants, and so forth—rendering insecure the position of an overwhelming majority of the agrarian population. Population growth, too, made small holdings increasingly unviable for successive generations. These, coupled with the turn towards commercial, market-oriented agriculture, resulted in a massive increase in poor, unemployed, and underemployed workers across rural India. All this gradually set in train a pattern of migration, largely circular, between rural and urban areas. The latter, owing to patchy industrial development, were in no position to employ this "footloose labour," resulting in the mushrooming of "informal" work as well as slums and shanties in Indian towns and cities.[13]

The developmental aspirations of the postcolonial state were enabled by the commanding presence of the Congress party in the Indian polity. At the moment of independence, the party had pointedly ignored the advice of its tallest leader, Mohandas K. Gandhi, to liquidate itself as a political entity and work for social transformation. On the contrary, the Congress turned its back on mass mobilization and became an electoral machine, as well as the hub of the governing class. Indeed, it was the party's ability to prevail in successive elections that enabled the Nehru government to pursue a consistent strategy of economic transformation and avoid succumbing to short-term political expediency.

The Congress party dominated Indian politics at all levels: from the central government and parliament to the states, and all the way down to the districts and villages. The iron frame of the party's organization

was also the work of Patel—one that lasted well past his death in 1950. The national, state, and local units of the party were soldered in circuits of appropriate authority and autonomy. The leadership at every level was chosen by elected representatives and enjoyed their confidence. The executive and legislative wings were separated by functions but fused in purpose. To be sure, this model never functioned quite as smoothly. By the end of Nehru's tenure, it had curdled into an oligarchy of regional satraps. However, it remained until 1962 a formidable electoral force sprawling the center ground of politics—with the opposition parties of the right and the left relegated to the margins.

The social bases of the Congress juggernaut were commensurately wide. From its inception, the Indian National Congress had claimed to speak for the entire nation. Although this claim was confuted by several groups and parties, most effectively the Muslim League, after independence and partition the Congress did command the waterfront—for a time. The key social groups whose allegiance cemented the party's electoral ascendancy were the landed elites and dominant castes of rural India, and the salaried middle classes and capitalists in town and cities. Both the dominant agrarian castes and the capitalists had swung firmly behind the Congress in the first provincial elections of 1936 held under British rule.

The dominant agrarian castes comprised groups that were middling in the caste hierarchy: below the Brahmins and other "upper castes" but above the "untouchables"—and variously categorized as "intermediate" and "backward castes." But they commanded considerable social power in the villages. The dramatic collapse of agricultural prices in the Great Depression of the 1930s rallied these agrarian castes behind the Congress party. The latter responded by espousing land reforms, the scope and scale of which—after independence—strengthened the power of these dominant castes without alienating the landed elites too much. That done, Congress governments prudently abstained from any further change in patterns of rural landholding, while continuing to avow their intent to give more to the landless. Having buckled the support of the dominant castes, the Congress reaped rich electoral dividends, for the social standing and influence of these groups ensured that the party dominated rural India—up to a point.

Yet the Nehru government's pronounced tilt towards industry also sowed disenchantment. In north India, it led to the rise of political leaders such as Charan Singh who advocated greater resources for agriculture, while warning against any move towards cooperative farming on the socialist model.[14] The gradual deflation of the five-year plans made them more clamant about their economic needs and interests. By the mid-1960s many of these groups put the Congress party on notice: either by shifting their votes to others or by forming their own parties.

Indian capitalists, too, had cast their lot with the Congress during the Great Depression. The British Empire had been a vector of globalization and had held out some opportunities for indigenous mercantile and business groups. However, the Indian economy was dominated by British capital. By the 1930s, the bigger Indian businesses were keen to have their own national arena of capital accumulation—hence the support for the Congress party and its ideas for planned economic development, with the state taking the lead in building basic infrastructure. The planned economy proved a finely feathered nest for a small brood of Indian businesses. Still, the trammels on business expansion, the subordinate status to the public sector, and the talk of "socialism" all chafed on a fraction of Indian capitalists, who supported institutions to propagate the virtues of free markets and eventually the Swatantra Party led by Nehru's erstwhile senior colleague, C. Rajagopalachari.[15] The Congress did not have to worry on account of electoral financing, but the peeling away of a segment of the capitalist class did impact its standing.

Indira Gandhi's accession to power in January 1966 thus came at a juncture when the developmental state had sputtered to a halt amid war and drought, and the Congress party's hold on the polity seemed more uncertain than ever. Two major developments early in the following year would cast into sharp relief the crisis of the old order.

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As the results trickled in on the morning of 23 February 1967, a miasma of gloom enveloped the ruling party. The rest of the day held out an unremitting diet of humble pie. India had recently held its fourth general election. The Indian National Congress was returned to power,

but on a knife-edge majority in a rather bedraggled condition. The Congress's share of votes dropped 4 percentage points from the 1962 election to 40.8 per cent, but its share of seats in parliament plunged from 73 per cent to 54.4 per cent—leaving it with 283 in a house of 520. The outcome of the elections to state legislatures was yet more damaging. The Congress party lost its stranglehold on important states across the country: Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, Punjab and Haryana, Orissa and West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Many of the party's stalwart leaders had crashed to defeat. The most galling of these was the trouncing of the party's president by a young student in the southern state of Tamil Nadu.

The 1967 election was significant in other ways too. In the first place, it registered a sharp rise in electoral participation. Voter turnout had steadily increased from just under 45 per cent of registered voters in the first general election of 1952 to 55 per cent in the third election of 1962, and touched 61 per cent in 1967. In absolute numbers of voters, the turnout in 1967 of 152.7 million was nearly double that of 1952. This remarkable expansion of electoral participation underscored the rising awareness among the people of the importance of politics and of elections as a mode of influencing it. The 1967 election also showed that the widening of the electorate was accompanied by a deepening of democracy. Notable among those who had flocked to the polling booths were rural voters from the nether reaches of Indian society: the lower castes and the poorer classes.

Finally, the outcome of 1967 exposed the electoral Achilles' heel of the ruling party. The Congress's ability to dominate Indian politics had owed much to its reputation as the legatee of the anticolonial freedom movement, its formidable party organization, and its capacity to coopt a range of social groups. Equally important was the working of the first-past-the-post electoral system. Although the Congress had never garnered a plurality of votes in any previous election, it had commanded enormous majorities in the parliament. In 1952, its 45 per cent vote share had translated into 364 of 479 seats in the Lok Sabha; in 1957, a 47.8 per cent vote share had yielded 371 of 494 seats; in 1962, 44.7 per cent of votes gave it 361 of 494 seats. Clearly, the Congress was able to secure such parliamentary majorities because of the absence of unity

among the parties opposed to it. Ahead of the 1967 polls, the latter had realized as much and made strenuous efforts, especially in north India, to arrive at electoral arrangements that would render the races tighter than ever before. Altogether, the 1967 elections appeared to herald the beginning of the end of the Congress party's dominance.

Weeks later another flare arced across the political skies, signaling a new challenge not just to the ruling party but to the authority of the Indian state. A land dispute erupted in the Naxalbari area of West Bengal. The rural poor in these parts, led by militant local communists, protested the eviction of tenants and hoarding of foodgrains by the landlords. When the local authorities sought to tamp down the agitation, the standoffs quickly escalated. The peasants took to country-made arms and began cutting down the landlords. The Bengal government, which included communists in the new ruling coalition, came down heavily, imprisoning and scattering the rebels. Yet these events hooked the imagination of students, especially in Calcutta and Delhi, with hopes of a revolution—an alluring prospect against the drab electoral scene. Hundreds dropped out of campuses and joined the underground "Naxalite" revolution.

The theoretical armature of the revolution rested on the claim that Indian democracy was a sham and the parliament a "dictatorship" of the big capitalists and big landlords. As if on cue, the governing class in New Delhi was quick to grasp the ideological and practical challenge that the nascent rebellion posed to the Indian state. To assert its authority and quell the revolt, the state bore down on the Naxalites with all its might. The state's response seemed, however, to affirm their claim that it was a despotism masquerading as a democracy. And it risked further dulling popular allegiance to the Indian state and parliamentary democracy.

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The outcome of the general election and the outbreak of the Naxalbari revolt together underscored the crisis of the old order. The Congress Raj that took over from the British Raj was aptly described as a "one-party dominant system."[16] Yet, to understand the manifold challenges it confronted in the mid-1960s, we need to push beyond this classic

formulation. For democracy is a polyvalent concept. It stands, in the first instance, for a form of rule. In ancient Greek, it connoted the rule (often violent) of the *demos*: the poorer and propertyless classes. In the modern conception, it refers to a political regime authorized by a constitution that has popular sanction. Further, democracy is a system of choosing representatives and rulers. Finally, democracy is a form of government that is ostensibly responsive to the people. The crisis of the old order encompassed each of these dimensions. It was at once a crisis of hegemony, a crisis of representation, and a crisis of governance.

The term "crisis" compresses an accordion of meanings. Two of these have acquired salience and are relevant to our story: a chain of events tending towards a point of decision when things could get better or worse; and a historically transitional phase "whose unknown future seems to give free scope to all sorts of wishes and anxieties, fears and hopes," including a lack of certainty about when the transition will occur and where it might lead.[17] The old order of postcolonial India was in crisis in both these senses: a reckoning seemed at hand, even as the way ahead was befogged.

The postcolonial state inherited the administrative and coercive apparatus of colonial rule. The new rulers of India deployed these to considerable effect in mastering the humanitarian catastrophe that accompanied partition and in snuffing out incipient challenges to their authority. However, the Indian state and its leadership wanted to be not just feared but loved. They sought to construct a hegemonic order in which consent of the ruled would count for more than coercion of the state. The constitution of 1950 duly authorized such a state by enthroning the ideology of popular sovereignty and by establishing universal suffrage for the overwhelmingly poor and illiterate populace.[18] This was complemented by the attempt to secure the material bases of consent by the promise of development.[19]

The state's hegemony was now shaken precisely because the material bases of consent were evaporating. A vein of agitation had always throbbed under the seemingly placid surface of early independent India—not to mention the insurrections in the northeastern regions of Nagaland and Mizoram. The use of military force coupled with extraordinary legal powers in these parts could be explained away, like

Marlowe's Barabas, as unfortunate actions in a distant land. However, if Naxalbari was a harbinger of future revolts in the "mainland," then the state would have to employ far greater doses of coercion to preserve its authority.

The crisis of representation surfaced in the general elections of 1967. Such crises occur when "social classes become detached from their traditional parties." They are often a concomitant of the crisis of hegemony. They are usually the fallout of failure "in some major political undertaking" for which the "consent of the broad masses" was sought. Alternatively, they may arise when these masses "have passed suddenly from a state of political passivity to a certain activity."[20] The visible failure of the developmental state ensured that both these conditions obtained in 1967.

This crisis of representation was, of course, umbilically tied to a crisis of governance. For the economy was a shambles—principally owing to the failures of planning and policy. The government's competence was called further into question owing to its inability to import enough food in time. The fourth five-year plan was shelved as hopeless, even as New Delhi looked abroad for urgent assistance. The political and technocratic assurance of the Nehru era now seemed a mirage.

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At the crossroads of these crises of hegemony, representation, and governance stood the new, young, and inexperienced prime minister. She may have been catapulted into office by the unanticipated death of Shastri, but Indira Gandhi was no novice in politics.

Born on 19 November 1917, Indira Priyadarshini Nehru was the only child of Jawaharlal and Kamala Nehru. A single girl child was a rarity in her generation and social class. Then again, the family into which she was born was rather distinctive. Her grandfather Motilal Nehru was an immensely successful and ambitious lawyer, who was determined to recast his family in Western mores. This not only involved changes in lifestyle and education, but a gradual move towards a more liberal ordering within the family.[21] The public stage on which her life would be enacted was also undergoing dramatic changes. She was born in a time of war, revolution, and upheaval. Western imperialism and the

Bolshevik revolution would cast a long shadow on her public life. From the outset, then, the personal and the political were closely entwined in the life of Indira Gandhi.

Indira's early years saw her family being sucked into the vortex of nationalist politics under the inspiration of Mahatma Gandhi. It is no exaggeration to say that in the years ahead, the Nehrus were consumed by politics. Young Indira was seeped in the nationalist ethos of her family. Just shy of her thirteenth birthday, she wrote to her father that her friends had decided her future profession, hastening to add: "That is of course after we have got Swaraj [independence] – till then every one has just one job – fighting."[22]

The family's immersion in the nationalist movement also told on Indira. With her parents and relatives in and out of prison and her mother chronically ill, Indira found herself shouldering far greater responsibilities than did most children of her age. The psychological consequences of her periodic loneliness have been the subject of much speculation by her biographers. Of greater interest, though, is the impact of this situation on her formal education. In 1931, Nehru sent her to the Pupils' Own School in Poona. This experimental school, started by a young couple, sought to inculcate in the students an awareness of their cultural heritage. Three years later she was sent to another unorthodox educational institution: Rabindranath Tagore's Visva Bharati in Santiniketan. Barely a year later, Indira had to leave Santiniketan and accompany her ailing mother to Europe for treatment.

The time spent in these unorthodox schools, especially Santiniketan, helped her develop a taste for the visual arts and dance. But her exposure to the humanities and the sciences was limited. Nehru was, of course, well aware of these shortcomings. And he took it upon himself to provide a remarkable course of epistolary education from the prison. Not only did he write for her, as a series of letters, a sprawling outline of world history—he also directed her towards his own favorites in history and literature: Trevelyan on Italian history, Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells, and Aldous Huxley, among others.

After her mother's death in January 1936, Indira joined Badminton School in Bristol in preparation for going to Oxford. The following

October, she joined Somerville College to read history. By her own account, she found her studies tough going. While she enjoyed history, she was soon toying with the idea of switching to Politics, Philosophy and Economics. The problem with PPE, she admitted, was that "it means a terrible lot of work & jolly hard work too. And also I am not very good with economics."[23] Eventually, it was her poor health and not her lack of application that forced her to leave Oxford without a degree. In the summer of 1939, she took ill and had to be treated for tuberculosis in Switzerland. This unconventional and interrupted education left Indira with an uneven intellectual apparatus. She had wide interests and was quick on the uptake, but was not attuned to the demands of sustained reflection.

Yet these were formative years. Through her father's friend and admirer, V.K. Krishna Menon, she was drawn to socialist and anti-imperialist groups in London. The wars in China and Spain, as well as the brewing crisis in Europe, engaged her interest and energies. "Isn't the European situation perfectly sickening?" she wrote to Nehru just before the Munich agreement: "I knew Chamberlain couldn't be up to any good when he flew to Germany."[24]

Indira's early radicalism stemmed from the popular front politics of that period. The two main strands of this left an imprint on her thinking. The first was anti-imperialism. This came almost naturally to her in relation to India. But while in Europe she began to appreciate the wider implications of imperialism. A shard of this Leninism in international politics remained implanted in her mind. Then, there was anti-fascism. Indira's assessment of, and antipathy towards, European fascism molded her views about right-wing Hindu organizations in India such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which were inspired by the fascist currents of the interwar years, and shaped her approach towards them during her years in power.

When Nehru became prime minister in 1947, Indira had been married to Feroze Gandhi for five years and was the mother of two boys, Rajiv and Sanjay. Yet her sense of duty towards her father impelled her to move into the prime minister's residence, take over its management, and serve as her father's social hostess. Gradually, she was drawn into the world of politics. Accompanying Nehru on numerous inter-

national visits, she gained experience of diplomacy at the highest levels and met several important world leaders. At home, she began to take an interest in the moves and machinations that went on in the Congress party—things that her father despised—and to get the measure of the party as an institution.

Ahead of the first general elections in 1951–52, Indira Gandhi was asked by Congress workers to stand for parliament. She demurred. The boys were young and she had to manage the campaigns of her father and her husband in Uttar Pradesh. Feroze was duly elected, but their marriage was ever on the rocks owing to his insecurities and infidelities. "I have been," she confided in a friend, "and am deeply unhappy in my domestic life." In 1955, she was asked to join the Congress Working Committee (CWC)—the apex decision-making group of the party. Her entry into the CWC occurred at the behest of Congress President U.N. Dhebar and Shastri. These men principally saw her as a conduit to her father rather than a colleague whose political judgment they valued. Indira Gandhi was not oblivious of the patriarchal mores of the Congress old guard, but she remained tentative about her role. "I am confident enough of myself," she wrote to a friend, "but still humble enough to feel acutely embarrassed when all kinds of V.I.P.s come for advice": "Can you imagine me being an 'elder statesman'?"[25]

From her perch, though, she acquired a closer view of the structures and routines of the party. In particular, she felt that her father was too accommodative of the regional bosses, and told him so: "you are tending more and more to accept almost without question, the opinions of certain people with regard to certain parts of the country. Morarjibhai for Bombay, Gujerat, Maharashtra etc, Bidhan Babu for Bengal, Bihar, Kamaraj for Tamilnad. These are very fine men and our top leaders, but no one is big enough or detached enough to be the only word on matters of their area."[26] This judgment foreshadowed her tussle for power with the party's old guard in times ahead.

Ahead of the second general elections of 1957, Indira Gandhi yet again refused to contemplate running for parliament, though she was more heavily involved in this election owing to her additional role in vetting candidates. Two years later she was elected president of the Congress party. This unexpected elevation was piloted by Dhebar, who

did not want to complete his second term, and the home minister, G.B. Pant. Indira, by her own account, was unwilling but eventually succumbed to the party elders' importunate requests. Nehru had been cool to the idea, partly because he doubted her experience and partly because he did not want to give the impression of a dynastic arrangement. At any rate, he did not thwart the move.

Her tenure as Congress president stood out primarily for her role in orchestrating the downfall of the recently elected, first communist government in the state of Kerala. This episode showed how far she had swung from the left-wing radicalism of her youth. More significantly, it suggested a disregard bordering on disdain for the rules and norms of parliamentary government. At the height of that kerfuffle, a leading newspaper interviewed both the prime minister and the Congress president:

> Reporter: Are you going to fight the communists or throw them out?
> Nehru: Throw them out? How? What do you mean? They have also been elected.
> Indira Gandhi: Papu, what are you telling them? You are talking as prime minister. As Congress president I intend to fight them and throw them out.[27]

Notwithstanding his air of puzzled rectitude, the eventual decision to dismiss the Communist government in Kerala was taken by Nehru.

Indeed, Indira Gandhi showed little will to power. She declined a second term as Congress president and stood down after eleven months. Underlying this decision was a deep yet inchoate desire to be her own person: not her father's daughter, or the prime minister's assistant, or yet an empty vessel into which older congressmen could pour their interests and ambitions. "I have felt like a bird in a very small cage," she wrote to Nehru (though they were in the same house) in late 1959. The experience of being Congress president had admittedly been "exhilarating at times, depressing at times, but certainly worthwhile." All the same, she could "only be warped & unhappy if I have to continue." Indira felt she had paid off her debts. "The time has come for me to live my own life. What will it be? I don't know at all."[28]

Her husband's unseasonable demise and her father's failing health put paid to any immediate prospect of change. She sent both her boys for education in England. And as a single mother living in another country, she frequently worried about them, especially her younger one, Sanjay. "He is a different type from Rajiv," she wrote to an old friend in London, "more practical in some ways and yet more shy and diffident in others." Later, she would note: "He is so much like I was at his age – rough edges and all."[29] Just before Nehru's death in 1964, she was seriously contemplating moving to England and living with her sons. One of the main reasons she accepted a cabinet portfolio under Shastri was her need for a salary and a house. At the same time, she did regard herself as the keeper of the Nehruvian flame.

Indira Gandhi's subsequent metamorphosis into the most powerful politician of her age was entirely unforeseen by her patrons and detractors alike. No one took her seriously until it was too late. Through her years in political life—she ruled India for all but three of the next eighteen—she was at once the most adulated and execrated public figure in the land. Her colleagues and adversaries, predominantly men, saw her as ruthless and aloof. "I am neither authoritarian nor cold," she privately insisted: "But I am not effusive, and perhaps this is misunderstood."[30] Yet a willfully cultivated aura of ruthlessness—as distinct from a highly developed instinct for power—was apparently her shield in an arena of politics shot through with gendered mores: one in which a woman prime minister could casually be called a "*gungi gudiya*" (dumb doll) or a "*chokri*" (derisive term for girl). As a close aide recalled, "she did not mind her critics calling her amoral and ruthless."[31] Or as she once wrote to her father, "The world is a cruel place for the best of us and specially so for the sensitive. We are apt to guard ourselves with whatever armour we can lay our minds on."[32]

Indira Gandhi's posthumous reputation remains as fractured. Opinion polls have regularly thrown her up as the best prime minister the country has ever had. And her memorial in central Delhi continues to draw busloads of tourists every day. Yet the Emergency—a twenty-one-month authoritarian interlude between 1975 and 1977—casts a baleful shadow in public memory. This has intensified a shade since the advent of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014. An RSS-worker

who had been forced underground during the Emergency, he has seldom passed up an opportunity to remind the country of those "dark days." His government has designated 25 June, the anniversary of the Emergency, as "Samvidhaan Hatya Divas," or Constitution Assassination Day. Then again, Mr. Modi's critics are quick to point out that he has gone further than Indira Gandhi in undermining democratic institutions—without having to declare an emergency or set aside the constitutional rights of the people.

A salutary consequence of these annual ructions has been a spurt of scholarship on the Emergency itself. Christophe Jaffrelot and Pratinav Anil's *India's First Dictatorship* is the most detailed and best-researched account of this critical episode.[33] Gyan Prakash's *Emergency Chronicles* has opened new lines of inquiry that thread together intimate and public histories. These books have also occasioned lively exchanges on the place and meaning of this episode in the history of Indian democracy. Neither book ignores the longer historical background, but it invariably becomes mood music for the march towards the Emergency.[34]

By contrast, Indira Gandhi's wider political career has not elicited comparable attention in recent times. Shelves continue to heave under the cumulative weight of older biographies, memoirs, and contemporary accounts—none of which were based on documentary sources. These remain, for the most part, exercises in condemnation or condonation. Explanation and understanding, archival scholarship and cool interpretation remain at something of a discount. There are two important exceptions to this trend. Ramachandra Guha's *India After Gandhi* provides a vivid account of these years encased within a magisterial narrative of independent India's history.[35] Jairam Ramesh's *Intertwined Lives* is a biography of Indira Gandhi's closest advisor in her early years, P.N. Haksar.[36]

Still missing is a book that charts and explains the entire arc of Indira Gandhi's political career: from her ascent to power in January 1966 to her assassination in October 1984. A principal challenge in writing such an account is not the shortage but the surfeit of materials on this period. Indira Gandhi's own papers remain closed, but there are voluminous collections of private papers and correspondence left behind by her advisors and adversaries. Since I started researching this book in

2010 there has also been a massive declassification of files, including from the prime minister's secretariat, which can be accessed in the National Archives of India. Besides, there are scattered collections of papers at various archives in the United States. I have tried to use these riches without larding the book with archival sources and references. But my interpretation of this period has been shaped by a prolonged immersion in these materials.

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This book is a political history of India in the Indira Gandhi years. I suggest that these years are best understood as part of a delimited historical period, the long 1970s, which stretched from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s.[37] The long 1970s were the hinge on which the contemporary history of India turned, transforming the young postcolonial country into today's India. The idea of the long 1970s thus corresponds to the notion of crisis as a prolonged period of uncertain change.

India's long 1970s, I further argue, can only be understood in the context of the global history of this period: the parabola of historical time encompassing the global youth revolts of the late 1960s, through the extraordinary economic and energy crises of the 1970s, to the "neoliberal" turn of the early 1980s. Viewed in this broad context, the travails of Indian democracy do not seem exceptional but located at the end of a spectrum. Hardly any democratic government was reelected in the 1970s, and even the more established democracies balanced at the brink of constitutional rule. Intellectuals and observers of various ideological hues spoke of a crisis of governability or a crisis of legitimation.[38]

In the story that follows I emphasize the confluence of three large global processes in the long 1970s—processes that played out concurrently and impinged decisively on India. First, after two decades of fabulous growth following the war, the advanced industrial (G-7) economies were entering a period of a long downturn. Between 1965 and 1973, aggregate manufacturing profitability in these countries came down by about 25 per cent. This was largely owing to a wave of low-cost Japanese- and German-manufactured goods that washed the global economy, resulting in international overcapacity and overproduction and a consequent decline in profitability. The United States, which had

enabled the entry of Japanese and German firms as a concession to key allies in the Cold War, was the first to face the brunt. Other advanced capitalist economies followed suit, with knock-on consequences for the world economy as a whole.[39]

Further, this economic slowdown coincided with the United States' deepening war in Vietnam, threatening to blow a crater into American deficits. It also rendered increasingly untenable Washington's commitment to the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates (with the US dollar pegged to gold) and controls on movement of finance capital across national economies. In August 1971, Nixon suspended dollar–gold convertibility—the cornerstone of the arch—touching off global financial volatility and currency fluctuations, which eventually culminated in the United States' departure from and the collapse of the Bretton Woods system. The world economy entered an unnerving era of galloping inflation, gyrating exchange rates, and the globalization of finance.[40]

Finally, there was the "oil shock" of 1973. The proximate trigger was the outbreak of war between Israel and its Arab neighbors in October 1973. But its origins lay in the attempts since the 1950s by oil producers in the Middle East to benefit more from their natural resources, which were being tapped by Western multinational oil giants. In 1960, the governments of Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela formed the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). For the rest of this decade, it remained an informal group collectively bargaining for better prices with the multinationals. Since oil was priced in US dollars, Nixon's move to devalue the dollar by suspending and smashing the Bretton Woods system sent the OPEC members' real revenues plunging south. The move towards a steep hike in oil prices was already afoot by mid-September 1973. The Arab–Israeli war provided a convenient pretext. For the OPEC could count on at least a thimbleful of Third World solidarity from most of its customers, even as they paid vastly more for each barrel of oil.[41]

The 70 per cent hike in prices went with production cutbacks (especially by Saudi Arabia) and an oil embargo on Israel's allies. The cumulative effect was to drive up prices continuously until they stabilized by the year end at around $12 per barrel. This four-to-five-fold increase in

the price of a crucial source of energy sent the global economy careening in an unfamiliar combination of stagnation and inflation. A second "oil shock" would follow in 1979 in the wake of the revolution in Iran and the onset of the Iran–Iraq war.[42] The oil shocks of the 1970s led to the dethroning of the reigning consensus in Western countries about Keynesian economic management, paving the way for a turn towards market-oriented "neoliberal" policies and frameworks.[43]

To be sure, Indian history in this period had its own specificities and cannot simply be folded into a history of global connections. Yet these have to be taken in hand to explain the big changes that occurred in India. For instance, the global economic and energy crisis of 1973–74 sent inflation soaring in India, setting in train a spiral of popular unrest and state repression that culminated in the Emergency. Similarly, the 1979 oil shocks led to -5 per cent GDP growth: the sharpest contraction of the Indian economy in the twentieth century and one that set the stage for Indira Gandhi's return to power after a spell in the political wilderness. The global conjuncture played a crucial role in shaping India's long 1970s.

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The narrative that follows draws on the whole palette of political motivations—power, insecurity, interests, idealism, uncertainty, passions, emotions—in portraying the intentions and choices of Indira Gandhi and her contemporaries as they confronted the structural crises of the Indian political system and the conjunctural global currents of the long 1970s. In so doing, it also underscores the frequently orthogonal relationship between human intentions and historical events and outcomes: the terms on which life and fate stand.

India's long 1970s, I argue, were marked by three major changes stemming from the conjoint crises of hegemony, representation, and governance: in the political system, in the mode of politics, and in the management of the economy.

Start with the fundamental transformation of the Indian political system between 1967 and 1975. This was spurred by the crisis of the old order and the manner in which Indira Gandhi and her contemporaries responded to it. Importantly, this transformation *preceded* the

Emergency. Indeed, the imposition of the Emergency can only be explained by this major change. The systemic change in Indian politics was not merely due to the rise of new actors, parties, and social groups in politics. The change took place, above all, at the level of the two system-wide components that influence *all* actors.

The first is the institutional arrangement of political actors according to their differing functions and relative power.[44] In the model of parliamentary democracy adopted by India, this meant the functional separation of the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary. Since the executive came from the party dominant in parliament, it could rely on the latter to support its legislative agenda. By the same token, the executive had to carry with it the parliamentary party. The party in parliament, therefore, acted as a subtle but critical check on the executive. The judiciary, on the other hand, could review the constitutionality of parliamentary and administrative actions.

The second, and related, attribute is the constituent rules—procedures, principles, norms, understandings—that shape the pursuit of divergent aims by political agents and regulate competition among them.[45] We could call these the "rules of the game" of parliamentary democracy: election of representatives and functioning of the houses; formation and dissolution of governments; the relationship between cabinet, prime minister, and the president; the appointment of judges, and so on.

Both these attributes of a political system—functions and relative power, and the rules of the game—are defined but not exhausted by the provisions written into the constitution. Conventions and precedents, informal norms and expectations play a critical role in oiling the machinery of parliamentary democracy.[46] Above all, this system calls for "democratic self-control" or a "lot of voluntary subordination" on the part of all actors:[47] parties in parliament, the executive, and the judiciary—each vis-à-vis the other.

The systemic change in Indian politics during the long 1970s occurred on both dimensions. The years between 1967 and 1973 witnessed a dramatic shift in relative power towards the executive, especially the prime minister. This happened in the first instance through Indira Gandhi's move to split the Congress party, so loosening the

restraints of the party on the executive. Simultaneously, there was a remarkable accretion of power in the prime minister's office at the expense of the cabinet. This rise in executive power was confirmed, cemented, and strengthened by the stunning victories in the general elections of 1971, the war with Pakistan later that year, and the state elections of 1972. This enabled the prime minister, thereafter, to challenge and curb the functions and powers of the supreme court.

These dramatic shifts in relative power were accompanied by changes in the collective beliefs and expectations of political actors about the rules of the game of parliamentary democracy. As the game grew increasingly competitive from 1967 onwards, its rules, procedures, and norms were frequently cast aside in pursuit of power—even if the outcome was greater instability of governments in the states. Following Indira Gandhi's massive electoral wins in 1971–72, the opposition, as well as the ruling party, sought to strain—if not altogether slip—the leash of these rules of the game. This trend was dramatically accentuated by the conjunctural global economic crisis of 1973–74, culminating in a showdown between the executive and the political opposition that led to the imposition of the Emergency. Nevertheless, after the Emergency and the crashing defeat of Indira Gandhi, there was no collective turning of minds towards renewing the rules of the game. In consequence, the political system remained volatile through the long 1970s.

The second major change of the long 1970s was the introduction and consolidation of a mode of "charismatic" rule. It is better described as Caesarist, for charisma is one aspect of it. This mode of politics aims at surmounting the crisis of representation and papering over the underlying social cleavages by a leader's ability directly to connect with the people, unmediated by party structures or parliament. Elections in this mode acquire the quality of a popular "acclamation" of the leader.[48]

Charisma becomes important in this context. Charismatic figures are considered extraordinary or endowed with exceptional qualities. Yet, in democratic politics, charisma is an ironic attribute. It does not, in the first instance, stem from the popular perception of a leader as charismatic. Rather, it is the leader's ability to prevail in a highly competitive and fractured political landscape that is seen as confirmation of charisma.

Thereafter, the party is "forced . . . to submit to the leadership of men with genuinely political temperaments and gifts as soon as such men show themselves capable of winning the trust of the masses."[49] Successful leadership in war plays an analogous role in the Caesarist mode of politics.[50]

Indira Gandhi accomplished precisely this with the elections of 1971–72 and the war against Pakistan. Her ability to resuscitate the Congress's flailing political fortunes and take them to new heights implanted a belief in her charisma among colleagues as well as party workers. Consider Y.B. Chavan, a senior congressman who broke with her after the post-Emergency electoral debacle in 1977. When Indira Gandhi returned from political exile to win a by-election the next year, Chavan—now an adversary—wrote to her of the "unusual and intimate relationship that has been built between you and the masses," which had made "you the spearhead for realisation of their expectations and aspirations."[51] This acknowledgment of the charisma and effectiveness of the Caesarist mode crafted by Indira Gandhi is remarkable because it came at the trough of her political career.

The institutional counterpart of Caesarism is a strong executive—preferably directly elected by the people. This model of executive presidency was prefigured in the United States and consummated in the French Fifth Republic under Charles de Gaulle. Indeed, this presidentialization of democracies is a widespread tendency that took root in the long 1970s.[52] In India, calls for a shift to a presidential model were a constant refrain in this period. During the Emergency, there was serious consideration of this choice, especially with reference to the Fifth Republic. In the event, the parliamentary system was retained, but it was endowed with an overweeningly powerful executive through a major amendment of the constitution. The worst features of this were rolled back after the Emergency. Yet a strong presidential-style executive retained its charm for influential figures in the Congress, including Indira Gandhi.

The idea of Caesarism also reminds us that, contrary to received wisdom, democracy and dictatorship are not polar opposites. After all, Caesar himself was a popular dictator. The very history of the term democracy suggests its "extreme and uncomfortable closeness" to dictatorship.[53] Indeed, it has been argued that "dictatorship is just as little

the definitive antithesis of democracy as democracy is of dictatorship."[54] For dictatorships were historically conceived as parenthetical periods of accepted personal rule to save democracy from grave dangers. During these periods normal written laws would be set aside: the dictator would literally dictate. In modern constitutions, this takes the form of exceptional or emergency powers to meet serious threats to the political system.[55] Democracy, Caesarism, and dictatorship, then, are not watertight compartments. The Caesarist mode of charismatic rule based on popular acclamation can, under extraordinary circumstances, shade into a claim of unopposed and accepted rule that lies above the law. In this sense, too, Indira Gandhi's crafting of a Caesarist politics paved the way for the declaration of emergency.

The third major change during the long 1970s was in response to the crises of hegemony and governance. The state's approach to economic development underwent significant and lasting changes. The developmentalist vision of the Nehruvian period slowly but surely gave way to an entirely different ensemble of governmental rationality and practice, drawing on new and evolving forms of expert knowledge on poverty and population, leading in time to novel techniques of policy, such as targeted programs for poverty alleviation.[56] Crucially, these governmental practices and policies were powered by a new fiscal-monetary machine jerry-rigged by the Indira Gandhi government. The resulting array of anti-poverty programs was aimed at bolstering the state's hegemony by crafting anew the material bases of consent. It achieved little immediate success but left a deep genetic imprint on the Indian state.

Another component of the evolving governmental rationality was in the approach to regulating the economy. The model of industrialization adopted by the developmental state, with licenses and controls coiling private businesses, evolved in the direction of relaxation of controls and a pro-business outlook. This was not a linear evolution, however. A fleeting attempt at liberalization in 1966 was followed by a lurch towards tightening the state's grip on the economy. This asphyxiating hold was relaxed during the economic shocks of 1973–74, which also forced the adoption of conservative macroeconomic policies. Thereafter, the state continued to shuffle towards deregulation for the remainder of

the long 1970s. In all, a nice illustration of Bertolt Brecht's maxim that "If there are obstacles, the shortest distance between two points may be the crooked line."

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Altogether, these three major changes—in the political system, the mode of politics, and political economy—were the making of contemporary Indian democracy. In telling this story, I have adopted a broadly chronological and thematic narrative, while pausing periodically to underline these shifts. Because of my interest in tracking and explaining these changes, the narrative that follows is fiercely selective and inevitably centered on high politics. Several important social and cultural changes in this period do not zoom into focus. I have worked on the premise that a history that tries to cover all of these would risk missing the forest for the subcontinental landscape. Finally, this book was written in a time when a new political configuration was crystallizing in Indian democracy. It would be idle to suggest that my political views on this recent turn have not shaded this historical account. But I have eschewed the temptation to traffic in any "lessons" between the past and the present—in either direction. Rather, I have sought to write a history that "supplies the antidote to every generation's illusion that its own problems are uniquely oppressive."[57]

1

THE END OF CONGRESS RAJ

Prime Minister Shastri's unforeseen death in January 1966 touched off a tussle for power within the ruling party. While Indira Gandhi was certainly quick off the blocks in declaring her interest, she could not previously have contemplated this as a serious possibility. Yet, as a member of Shastri's cabinet, she had pondered the state of the country and the Congress party as well as her own role in politics. Writing to an old friend, P.N. Haksar, two months earlier, she had struck a deeply pessimistic note: "The state of affairs is quite extraordinary here . . . As I see it, we are at the beginning of a new dark age. The food situation is precarious, industries are closing. There is no direction, no policy on any matter." Not only was the country's development juddering to a halt, but the response was to dilute its autonomy. "Brave words notwithstanding," she wrote, "there is anxiety to go to America, who will I have no doubt give PL 480 food aid and everything at a price. The manner of execution will be so deft and subtle that no one will realize it until it is too late and India's freedom of thought and action will both have been bartered away." Meanwhile, the Congress party was "dormant and inactive." Her personal predicament seemed equally stark: "When I am depressed, which is often, I feel I must quit. At other times, that I must fight it out." Indira Gandhi regarded herself as the custodian of her father's legacy. Yet, as the Nehruvian project of planned economic development and nonaligned foreign policy ran out of steam,

this legacy could well be turned against her: "As a child I wanted to be like Joan of Arc – I may yet be burnt at the stake."[1]

Indira Gandhi was prone to mythologizing her past, but she was no diffident dreamer. She knew that her ascent to the highest office could only be piloted by the powerful president of the Congress party, K. Kamaraj. Of humble origins in a poor family of the discriminated Nadar caste in southern Tamil Nadu, Kamaraj had had little formal education but formidable political experience. Starting out in anticolonial politics and a Congress party dominated by the upper castes, he had served as chief minister of Tamil Nadu for nearly a decade. In 1963, he had been asked by Nehru to take over as Congress president and help renew the party's organizational fabric. In fact, Nehru's own position had been enfeebled by the ignominious defeat against China the previous year, and he had been looking to strengthen his flanks. Kamaraj had shrewdly suggested that the road to organizational revival lay in getting all Congress chief ministers to resign and work for the party. The "Kamaraj Plan" had duly been implemented, so scotching any potential challenge to prime ministerial authority. After Nehru's death, he had tactfully taken soundings from scores of Congress leaders and had paved the way for Shastri's uncontested ascension.

After Shastri's passing, Kamaraj was pressed by his admirers to assume leadership of the government. Yet the canny Tamil politician was aware of his limitations in a political system dominated by an Anglophone elite and the Hindi belt of north India. Kamaraj also conveyed his disinterest to President Radhakrishnan and suggested that he was favorably inclined towards Indira Gandhi. Radhakrishnan now advised her to press ahead. But she was hardly the sole claimant for the job. Home Minister Nanda and Defence Minister Y.B. Chavan were also in contention. The former was the senior-most minister, who sported the curious ideological credentials of being the patron of both the socialist forum and the *sadhu samaj* (Hindu monks association); the latter had been chief minister of Maharashtra before being inducted into the union cabinet after the debacle against China. Above all, there was Morarji Desai.

The erstwhile chief minister of the old Bombay state and long-serving finance minister of India, Desai was an able and experienced

administrator who exuded an aura of high-minded rectitude. To many of his colleagues in government and party, this came across as puritanic inflexibility. His unwillingness ever to concede a point, as well as his refusal to dismount such hobby horses as prohibition of alcohol or regulation of gold, made many congressmen wary of him. Desai had fancied his chances after Nehru's death but had been thwarted by Kamaraj and other party bosses. Collectively known as the "syndicate," this group of regional grandees included Atulya Ghosh from West Bengal, Sanjiva Reddy from Andhra Pradesh, Nijalingappa from Karnataka, and S.K. Patil from Maharashtra.

Desai had stayed out of Shastri's cabinet but now pressed his claims with adamantine force. In so doing, he inadvertently strengthened Indira Gandhi's position. Stopping the implacable Desai became a high priority for the syndicate. By contrast, they regarded Indira Gandhi as politically unsure and ideologically indistinct: even the left wing of the Congress party, including those close to her father like V.K. Krishna Menon, had not supported her candidacy.[2]

Paradoxically, it was Indira Gandhi's political weakness that commended her to the party bosses—a choice they would have adequate leisure to rue after she had pensioned them to political oblivion. But the syndicate also reckoned that her ability to borrow her father's sheen would be a major asset in the coming general elections. Her case was further strengthened when in a deft move she enlisted the support of D.P. Mishra, the wily chief minister of Madhya Pradesh, and, through his machinations, the endorsement of eight other Congress chief ministers. Nanda and Chavan thought better of it and bowed out. But Desai was determined to have it out. On 19 January 1966, the Congress parliamentary party voted by secret ballot to choose the prime minister: the first and, it turned out, last time that the grand old party held such an election. Indira Gandhi took 355 votes to Desai's 169. The same evening, President Radhakrishnan invited her to form a new government.

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Indira Gandhi knew that her crowned head would lie more than usually uneasy. Unpalatable policy choices swirled in the eddies of unpredictable political currents. Bolstering her political position required careful

and considered moves. The economic situation seemed particularly dismal. The new prime minister had a broadly defined economic outlook, which she had imbibed from her father and from her extensive travels across the country. The main components of this were growth, modernization, and national self-reliance. However, unlike Nehru, she had no design for converting these large ideas into policies. From the outset, her approach to economic issues was laced with pragmatism. She admittedly knew little about economic policy, but she was prepared to learn from her advisors.[3] Yet her pragmatism could easily shade into a numbing expediency, for economic challenges were also the terrain on which many of her political conflicts played out.

In 1966, the Indian economy was facing a crisis compounded of three major, intertwined challenges: food, foreign exchange, and planning. What is more, internal problems were inextricably tied to external pressures. In the first place, successive failures of the monsoon—the lifeline of agrarian India—in 1965–66 had led to an unprecedented 17 per cent decline in agricultural production and pushed the country to the brink of starvation.[4] The United States, the main source of foodgrain imports, insisted that India abandon its experiment in cooperative agriculture and adopt the technology-intensive methods that went by the label of "the Green Revolution."

The American stance stemmed from President Lyndon Johnson's desire to spool in foreign aid and harness resources for his central initiatives: the Great Society program at home and the war in Vietnam. Further, it reflected the Johnson administration's concerns about a Malthusian specter haunting the world and the imperative of pushing food recipient countries to introduce new agricultural methods: particularly the use of hybrid seeds, pesticide, and fertilizers. Johnson lit upon the idea of making food aid conditional on such reforms by receiving countries. And India became the proving ground for this new approach. The president embarked on a "short tether" policy of supplying limited shipments of food for short periods in order to pressurize the Shastri government to adopt agricultural reforms. Dubbed in India as a "ship to mouth" policy, it occasioned much anguish during the locust years of 1965–66. Johnson's advisors, too, were concerned that such a harsh approach when the country lay writhing in the grip of scarcity would

deeply dent the relationship. The president was unmoved. His administration negotiated an agreement committing India to allocating $5 billion for agriculture during the next (fourth) five-year plan—more than double the allocation of the current plan. As further quid for the quo, Johnson wanted New Delhi to tamp down its critical stance on the Vietnam war.[5]

The food crisis was umbilically tied to the problem of foreign exchange. India paid for its food imports from the United States—under the PL 480 program—in its own currency, so saving US dollars for other imports projected in its five-year plans. Even so, Indian economic planners faced an ever-burgeoning requirement of foreign exchange, principally owing to the country's flaccid exports and consequent inability to earn foreign exchange.[6] During the third five-year plan (1961–66), India's export earnings were estimated at Rs. 51 billion ($10.71 billion), while its maintenance import requirements stood at Rs. 53 billion ($11.13 billion) and its debt-servicing obligations added up to another Rs. 13.5 billion ($2.84 billion). India's foreign exchange thus fell short by Rs. 15.5 billion ($3.26 billion) just to meet current expenditure.[7]

Now, the United States pushed India not only to reduce its food dependence but also to adopt new technologies, especially fertilizers. These would have to be imported until they could domestically be produced, which in turn would depend on the continuing purchase of crucial input commodities such as petroleum. In August 1965, the ministry of agriculture placed the foreign exchange costs of implementing the new strategy for the next five years at Rs. 11.14 billion ($2.34 billion), as against the foreign exchange worth Rs. 1.91 billion ($401 million) assigned to agriculture under the current (third) five-year plan.[8] India's foreign exchange position was set dramatically to deteriorate.

All this held crucial implications for Indian planning. For one thing, foreign exchange resources allocated for expansion of the core industrial sector would sharply be reduced. This threatened to upend the entire approach to planned industrialization. For another, the quantum of foreign assistance would have to be increased from around $1.1 billion for each year of the third plan to $1.7 billion a year from 1966 to 1971.

Experts in the Planning Commission did their best to paper over the cracks, but they knew that a reckoning was around the corner.

External pressures, too, were bearing down on India. Prodded by the United States, the World Bank called for sweeping economic reforms. In late 1964, a bank mission led by Bernard Bell had surveyed the Indian economy. The Bell mission identified an array of problems, many familiar but now acute: low agricultural productivity and inefficient public industries, excessive regulation and curbs on private investment, feeble exports and an overvalued currency. Bell's mammoth report, submitted in October 1965, sought no fewer than sixteen major reforms, starting with a devaluation of the Indian rupee. The report argued that India's persistent trade deficits arose from an overvalued exchange rate, which made its exports expensive and uncompetitive in foreign markets. After devaluing the rupee, the government should relax industrial licensing controls and import restrictions, thereby enabling market mechanisms to allocate scarce resources more efficiently.[9] Thereafter, the bank leaned heavily on the Indian government to embark on such liberalization of the economy. Given New Delhi's impecunious standpoint, adopting these policies seemed the only way to unlock more foreign aid.

Indira Gandhi was keen to preserve the Nehruvian model of economic development, but ironically it could only be preserved by change. As she wrote to a friend: "our economic situation is as bad as it can be. I do not see any way out except to follow some of the World Bank's advice and to get as much aid as we can . . . A weak nation can't resist foreign influence but I am convinced that with aid now we can become strong and stand on our own feet."[10] Having frowned imperiously on Shastri for beseeching the United States, she now realized there was no alternative. India's food import requirement had escalated from 4 million metric tonnes a year to 15 million tonnes—the bulk of which could only come from the United States.

When Johnson invited her to visit Washington, Indira Gandhi sensed an opportunity to secure India's existential requirements. She was determined to seek American assistance without appearing to be a supplicant. Yet, during her visit in March 1966, she did go out of her way to be amenable. The two leaders, she observed, "had indeed found

they had much in common." And their two countries could have "a good working partnership." The joint statement issued at the end of the visit also observed that India understood the American position on Vietnam. Johnson, for his part, agreed to secure congressional support for food aid and assistance from the World Bank. At a party in her honor, he patronizingly announced that he would ensure that "no harm comes to this girl."[11] As Johnson's officials noted, "he really went all out on the Indian situation."[12] The thaw in India–US relations was palpable.

The prime minister was initially smug about "the success of my American trip," but it turned out she had underestimated the blowback. Predictably, it was censured by the (pro-Soviet) Communist Party of India (CPI) and parts of the press. Worse, sections of the Congress party—including some members who were inclined towards Desai—publicly expressed their disapproval, giving point and poison to the arrows of the opposition. More nettlesome was pushing through urgent reforms in the teeth of a recalcitrant party. "The state of the economy is such that only a united concerted effort on our part can pull us out of the morass," the prime minister wrote, "but that unity does not exist within our party and even in my cabinet."[13] Yet she was determined to press ahead: "If I am unable to put through what I consider necessary for salvaging the situation, I must resign. I simply cannot remain and watch the country drifting down and down."[14]

On 6 June 1966, the government announced a steep devaluation of the Indian rupee—from Rs. 4.76 to the dollar to Rs. 7.50. The decision came at the end of several months of confabulations within the government as well as with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The IMF had recommended a new rate of Rs. 10 to the dollar, while the government had toyed with Rs. 7.15. Eventually they chose to peg it at Rs. 7.50 to the dollar, which also translated into a neat Rs. 21 to the sterling.[15] The decision was taken by the prime minister with a small group of economic advisors: her cabinet and senior party colleagues—barring the ministers of finance and agriculture—were in the dark until the IMF signaled its approval.[16]

In a subsequent radio address, the prime minister spoke of securing aid to give the economy a "strategic push," to rapidly increase production, and to triple the earnings from exports. Additional aid would

enable the government "to liberalise imports." Indeed, they had "already begun simplifying procedures and eliminating unnecessary and irksome controls so that everybody . . . whether in the public or private sector, can get on with the job."[17]

The announcement touched off clamorous ululations across the political spectrum. The prime minister was immediately assailed for undermining the Indian economy and selling out to the Americans. More dangerous to her own standing was the deep disapproval of senior congressmen, especially Kamaraj. At his instance, the CWC took the unprecedented step of adopting a resolution criticizing the devaluation. It was an index of Indira Gandhi's political weakness that she requested the president to intercede on her behalf with Kamaraj. Radhakrishnan spoke to him but also advised her to offer Kamaraj the deputy premiership. She held out the home ministry instead. Kamaraj refused to countenance the offer.[18] This made her more unsure of her standing in the party. "No one I know can figure out what Kamaraj wants," she wrote: "PM-ship? It can't be but there is something fishy. In the meantime, Morarji [Desai] has told someone that if I can be harassed enough, I shall not want to stand again and he is sure to come in."[19]

In the event, the manifesto for economic liberalization proved politically stillborn. Big business, too, was lukewarm in its response to devaluation, seeking rather more support, including access to foreign exchange, financing, and raw materials. Small industry associations and trade unions were squarely opposed to the projected reforms. Worse, the aid package expected by India (especially non-project assistance to the tune of $1 billion) failed to materialize.[20] In fact, net aid (gross disbursement less debt servicing) dropped from $1.1 billion in 1967–68 to $651 million in 1969–70.[21] Indira Gandhi quietly shelved the rest of the reform package. As B.K. Nehru, her cousin and senior mandarin, tartly observed, "as a result of the great political outcry . . . the Prime Minister was afraid to follow sensible economic policies for the fear that they might be subjected to the same non-sensible criticisms and reactions as followed her decision to devalue."[22]

Indira Gandhi's reaction to this early bout of mauling criticism stemmed from her insecurity as an inexperienced prime minister. But the episode underscored other traits that would become more pronounced in

times ahead. The first was her tendency to personalize the problem. As she complained to a friend, "the attack is a personal one on me." She went on to claim that there was "a tremendous move in parliament or rather the party against me—the right and left seem to be combining."[23] A week on, she maintained, "I am a solitary tree in the midst of a dust-storm. The 'right' and the 'left' are moving heaven and earth to mar my image in the Indian public."[24]

A related tendency was to work up domestic travails into a more sinister tableau with external powers plotting in the wings. After visiting Washington, Indira Gandhi conveyed to the Soviet Union that there had been no change in India's international posture of nonalignment. In turn, the Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin assured the Indian ambassador, T.N. Kaul, that "his Government would do everything possible to strengthen your position." Kaul advised her to visit Moscow soon.[25] Yet, as criticism from the communists and the left rose in a crescendo, she concluded that "it certainly seems feasible and possible that these views are the reflection of Soviet thinking and instruction." If that was the case, she peevishly noted, "what is the purpose of my visiting Moscow?"[26]

This episode also reinforced her sense that the United States was fundamentally opposed to India pursuing its own developmental trajectory. More importantly, she regarded the Johnson administration's maneuvers as aimed at undermining her political standing in India. She swiftly changed course. On 1 July 1966, her government issued a statement "deploring" American bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong. She also decided to visit the Soviet Union. Ahead of the trip, she stated: "Recent events have regrettably added to the grave danger of escalation . . . There can be no military solution in Vietnam . . . there must be an early, an immediate turning away from war in Vietnam." In Moscow, she signed up to a joint statement that "condemned" the "imperialist aggression" in Vietnam.[27] This swing to the left in foreign policy did not help much, however. There was no respite from criticism in parliament or the party. "I am feeling very depressed," she wrote, "with all one's desire to do things, is it worth the price?"[28]

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Gloomier still was the economic situation, which now looked freighted with catastrophe. Owing to a combination of severe drought and extensive flooding in the large northern state of Bihar in 1966, the grim reaper of famine loomed on the horizon. The drought not only had devastated the monsoon crop but also threatened the winter sowing. The problem was aggravated by a shortfall in rice production in the previous year. By early 1967, the state government would estimate that 34 million people were affected—13.4 million of whom were in "scarcity affected areas," where the crop yields had dropped to less than half of normal production.[29]

At the outset, New Delhi did not appreciate the gravity of the situation. Although state government officials and political leaders, including from the ruling Congress party, had warned of a dire situation, the union government treated it at par with the problem of food supply in several other states. An assessment by the Planning Commission at the end of August 1966 estimated a shortfall in food production by only a fifth of the average levels.[30] It took a missive from Jayaprakash Narayan, the highly respected elder statesman from Bihar, for New Delhi to be jolted out of its catatonia. Narayan wrote to the food and agriculture minister, C. Subramaniam, of "the situation created by the extraordinarily dry monsoon in practically this whole state—something which is unprecedented. At least I do not remember that there was such a drought in Bihar during my lifetime." Narayan urged the union government to take immediate steps to avert famine: "Not only adequate quantities of foodgrains would be required, but the poor would have to be given gainful employment so that they may have the wherewithal to buy the food that may be made available."[31] These measures were set out in the Bihar Famine and Flood Relief Code of 1957.

With general elections in just a few months, neither New Delhi nor the state government was keen officially to declare a famine. Yet, in early November 1966, the union government had to unroll a massive relief effort. The allocation of foodgrains to Bihar was more than doubled to 150,000 tonnes in December and remained on the upward curve each month until it peaked at 225,000 tonnes in the following year. Some 20,000 fair-price shops were set up to provide foodgrains at controlled prices. Around 30 million people were given ration cards

and 7.3 million were given free rations.[32] The government also supported the setting up of the Bihar Relief Committee under the leadership of Narayan and enabled international non-governmental organizations such as Oxfam and Care to undertake relief work.

Meanwhile, the food situation across the country remained fraught. The Arab–Israeli war of June 1967 led to the closure of the Suez Canal, resulting in a further reduction of food imports from the West. New Delhi was compelled to turn elsewhere for help. In early July, Indira Gandhi sent an urgent appeal to the Soviet premier. Describing the situation in India as a matter of "grave concern," she wrote, "our country has been in the grip of a severe drought for two successive years now." This had not occurred more than once in the century past. A shortfall of 30 million tonnes in two years of drought had had "catastrophic results." Against this backdrop, she felt "impelled" to request 500,000 tonnes of wheat in aid, though India was prepared to pay for the freight.[33] The prime minister sent a similar, if less plaintive, letter to her Australian counterpart, hoping that Canberra might be open to providing additional food aid—beyond the 150,000 tonnes already provided in the past year.[34]

This scalding experience fortified Indira Gandhi's conviction about the imperative of food self-sufficiency and economic self-reliance. As she said at a conclave of chief ministers: "Our nation's honour is involved. Our security is involved. The lives of our people are involved . . . we shall do whatever lies within our power NEVER AGAIN to let the country or parts of it pass through the kind of crisis with which we have been cursed during the last two years."[35] She now threw her weight behind the Green Revolution strategy—notwithstanding concerns about its potential social consequences. As she wrote to Congress MPs, "Without substantial increase in agricultural production . . . we cannot solve any problem . . . A very large segment of our resources have been mobilised for this purpose."[36] The new approach turned on the use of imported high-yielding strains of staple crops and chemical fertilizers, the availability of assured water supply, and mechanized harvesting equipment: all of which needed government subsidies and support.[37] New institutions such as the Food Corporation of India and the Agricultural Prices Commission were established to beef up procurement, to create adequate buffer stocks, and to ensure stability of food prices.

The new agriculture strategy paid handsome dividends, though, as anticipated, these were unequally distributed. Between 1965–66 and 1971–72, the overall production of wheat doubled. However, the yield and output of paddy—India's largest foodgrain crop—did not rise as significantly. The Green Revolution thus principally benefited the wheat-growing states of Punjab, Haryana, and western Uttar Pradesh.[38]

Regional disparities apart, the new agricultural strategy also exacerbated class and caste inequalities in rural India. As the Green Revolution got underway, it quickly enhanced the power of the rich and middle peasantry. These were the only social classes with the requisite economic muscle to take advantage of the agricultural strategy promoted by the government. The disparity between them and the poor peasants and landless laborers cracked wider than ever. Indira Gandhi and her close advisors were alive to this possibility, but they had decided there was no alternative to boosting agricultural production. However, they failed to foresee that the rise of the middle peasantry, most of whom belonged to the backward castes (higher in caste hierarchy than the scheduled castes—the erstwhile "untouchables" or Dalits—that accounted for most poor peasants and laborers), would have major political implications as well.

Domestic production of fertilizers was yet another challenge thrown up by the Green Revolution. India had to import fertilizers to the tune of $270 million in 1967–68 and over $300 million the following year. The World Bank and Aid to India consortium sounded the tocsin at this outflow of foreign exchange and increased debt. New Delhi, in consultation with the bank, had planned seventeen major units for fertilizer production in India. By its own estimates, though, this production would fall short of requirements by as much as 1.4 million tonnes in 1973–74 and 1.9 million tonnes the following year. The World Bank was prepared to finance the setting up of fertilizer plants but was unsure if they should all be government-controlled companies.

There was dissonance within the government on allowing the establishment of private fertilizer plants. The point of discord was a proposal by the leading Tata group to set up a fertilizer factory in Gujarat. Haksar, who usually championed public enterprises, made the case for Tata. Those opposing the Tata plant "with a great deal of vehemence," he argued, must "provide concrete alternate proposals which are practicable and can

produce the necessary amount of fertilizer in an identifiable period of time." With their backs to the wall, Indira Gandhi agreed with Haksar. She also assured the World Bank that India would strive to meet its commitments and requested more financial support.[39]

In a starker revelation of her willingness to sail with the wind, the prime minister shelved in November 1966 the draft fourth plan prepared by the Planning Commission and approved by the cabinet. The draft plan had envisioned public investment of Rs. 160 billion, but with no credible financial plan. It drew the ire of the captains of industry, who usually refrained from publicly reproaching the government. J.R.D. Tata denounced the "unsound planning . . . wrong priorities and inaccessible targets" that had brought the economy to this pass. He advised the government to clip the wings of the planners and curtail their role in economic policymaking. G.D. Birla warned that failures of planning would become a major issue in the coming general elections. He hoped that "the Congress will come back to power, at least in the Centre, but with a highly reduced majority . . . then they will have to be alert."[40] With elections in February 1967, the prime minister chose to blunt the criticism by declaring a "plan holiday."

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As the general elections approached, it became clear to Indira Gandhi that the Congress party remained in the grip of Kamaraj and the syndicate. The prime minister was dismayed that she hardly had a role in choosing the party's candidates for the elections. As a political confidant would recall, "her plight in this respect was such that if she wanted [a] Congress ticket for someone, instead of proposing the name herself, she asked someone close to her to put forward the name, lest it should give a chance to her opponents to humiliate her by rejecting it."[41] Indeed, her attempts to get some of her loyalists the party ticket met with polite demurral. Indira Gandhi realized that the only way to buttress her own position was to avow her popular standing. As she put it to the press, "Here is a question of whom the party wants and whom the people want. My position among the people is uncontested."[42]

The opposition parties began circling their wagons. Since the last general elections in 1962, these parties had begun to realize that the

only way to halt the Congress's electoral juggernaut was to come together politically. A splintered opposition enabled the Congress party to canter to victory in the first-past-the-post electoral system. By the same token, a united opposition could at least dent its dominance. This was easier said than done. For the Congress party splayed across the center ground of Indian politics, and the opposition parties were invariably perched further to the right or left. Principal among those on the right were the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Jana Sangh and the liberal, market-friendly Swatantra Party. To the left stood the two communist parties, the CPI having split in 1964, and the two socialist parties.

The Socialists had begun their careers in the 1930s as a groupuscule within the Congress called the Congress Socialist Party. Initially close to Jawaharlal Nehru, who was seen as embodying the progressive, leftist tendencies in the Congress, the socialists conspicuously broke with him and the party after independence. Nor could the socialists abide each other, and they soon split into smaller outfits. Unlike the Communists, the Socialists held that the main axis of inequality in Indian society was caste rather than class. In particular, they sought to cultivate the agrarian backward castes, especially in the north Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. After the first general elections of 1952, Ram Manohar Lohia emerged as the chief ideologue of the socialists, espousing a social critique of the country's Anglophone elite—a stance that led inescapably to advocacy of Hindi as the national language, so confining their appeal to the Hindi-speaking states of north India.

In the wake of India's defeat against China in 1962, Lohia sensed a moment of Congress weakness and an opportunity to plumb the possibilities of opposition unity. He sought to brigade the socialist splinter groups into a single party: the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP). More important, he reached across the political spectrum to Deen Dayal Upadhyaya, leader of the Jana Sangh, and suggested fielding a united opposition candidate in the by-elections of 1963. This strategy paid some dividends, though the durability of such a marriage of convenience seemed dubious.

Ahead of the general elections of 1967, Lohia and the SSP made strenuous efforts to reach pre-poll arrangements with the Jana Sangh. The Hindu nationalist party was riding the wave of a movement

demanding a complete ban on cow slaughter. The demand was hardly novel: it harked back to the founding constitutional moment of the late 1940s and earlier to the colonial period.[43] It was revived at the end of 1965 by a consortium of Hindu outfits including the Jana Sangh, its ideological sire, the RSS, and a gaggle of monks from assorted orders. A massive march on parliament in November 1966 turned violent and was put down by police firing, which left eight dead and nearly fifty seriously injured. This was followed by an indefinite fast by senior Hindu pontiffs. The prime minister brusquely stated that she would not be "cowed down by the cow savers."[44] Eventually, mindful of the upcoming polls and keen to draw the sting out of the agitation, she announced a high-level committee of inquiry into the demand for cow protection—with representatives of the movement. All this came as a shot in the arm to the Jana Sangh as polls neared.

The Jana Sangh, for its part, entered an electoral pact with the Swatantra Party. The latter, too, was having its moment under the sun: the party's longstanding critique of economic planning was apparently vindicated. Under the pact, Swatantra would field its own candidates only in a fourth of the seats where the Jana Sangh was also in contest. Ideological differences were slimmer here. The Swatantra Party seriously contemplated including in its election manifesto the demand for a national ban on cow slaughter. Although it eventually refrained from doing so, many of its leaders stood by the Jana Sangh in pressing the demand ahead of the polls.[45] The upshot of it all was a significant degree of opposition unity, especially in the north Indian states.

These rapidly shifting electoral alliances were accompanied by slower and deeper changes in the social bases of democratic politics in India. Since the 1950s, the rich and middle peasantry hailing from the intermediate and backward castes had been unhappy with the Congress government for its excessive tilt towards the landed and urban elites who also hailed from the upper castes. Their clout enhanced by the Green Revolution, they began chafing against the entrenched structures of the Congress and favoring other parties that could represent their interests and afford direct access to power. The departure from the Uttar Pradesh Congress of Charan Singh, stalwart leader of the middle-peasant Jat community, in 1967 to form the Bharatiya Kranti Dal was

a harbinger of this momentous shift. Within a couple of years, Charan Singh would succeed in crafting a broad, cross-caste and cross-class rural electoral base that went beyond the Jats (who accounted for only 9 per cent of the state's population), galvanized by the promise of higher subsidies on rural inputs and higher procurement prices for their crops.[46] Far south in Tamil Nadu, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) led by Annadurai had sewn together a robust social coalition of the "non-Brahmins," framed by an ethnic ideology and linguistic pride in the Tamil tongue.[47] The ground beneath the Congress party's giant feet was shifting.

In consequence, the fourth general elections were keenly contested. Indira Gandhi mounted a feisty campaign, zigzagging the country for some 15,000 miles and addressing hundreds of political rallies in two months. She pulled enormous crowds, like her father; but unlike him, she deployed a demotic cadence. "Your burdens are relatively light," she told the rural folk in her constituency in Uttar Pradesh, "because your families are limited and viable. But my burden is manifold because crores [tens of millions] of my family members are poverty stricken and I have to look after them."[48]

On the campaign trail, she also sensed that the syndicate was plotting to depose her after the polls. The extraordinary state of the grand old party is best glimpsed through the eyes of the vulnerable prime minister:

> Kamaraj has held talks with Morarji [Desai] and has told him that he no longer supports me. He says that Atulya Ghosh and Sanjiva Reddy will support him . . . He says he has most of the CMs [chief ministers] in his pocket +200 MPs!! . . . My own view is that the CMs will support me, with the exception of Bihar and perhaps Assam . . . Orissa is doubtful too—success in the election is doubtful and their behaviour after the election is also doubtful . . . UP—both groups are supporting [me] at the moment. [Chief Minister] Gupta would like Morarji included in the Cabinet . . . Rajasthan and MP [Madhya Pradesh] seem confident of victory and both support me. D.P. Mishra is a tricky person and is trying to be "in" with everybody. Mysore, though very close to Kamaraj, has assured me of

> support and so has CM Andhra [though] the Sanjiva Reddy group will be against me. West Bengal CM will probably support although he has not said so. Atulya Ghosh who is loudly and publicly proclaiming support may hedge. Maharashtra is solid and reliable—both [Y.B.] Chavan and the CM Gujarat will naturally support Morarji. Madras will support me unless Kamaraj is in the field, in which case about half may still support me. Kerala will be for me, so probably will Punjab, Himachal and Kashmir. Haryana is very much for Morarji but will see which way the wind is blowing.[49]

The results were an undeniable setback for her. The Congress barely held on to its majority in the Lok Sabha and lost its hold on key states across the country. The main consolation for Indira Gandhi was that several stalwarts of the syndicate and the old guard were trounced in their own constituencies: Kamaraj in Tamil Nadu, S.K. Patil in Bombay, Atulya Ghosh in Bengal, and Biju Patnaik in Orissa. So, the unprecedented electoral drubbing left her unscathed—for the moment.

Then again, Morarji Desai presented himself as a safer and more competent candidate for the top job. But most Congress leaders were loath to go through another bruising leadership contest. Kamaraj maintained that the party's poor showing was partly because "in-fighting among party-leaders assumed larger proportions during the elections."[50] So, he sought to facilitate a deal. Desai would settle for nothing less than deputy premiership and the home ministry. Meeting Indira Gandhi on 11 March 1967, he claimed with characteristic arrogance and tactlessness that the opposition was now strong: "As I have more experience I can meet their arguments better than you. You have not got much experience."[51] Morarji was oil to Indira's vinegar, yet she reluctantly consented to make him deputy prime minister, albeit with the finance ministry. Desai pocketed the deal. Reelected as leader of the Congress parliamentary party, Indira Gandhi thanked Kamaraj for his efforts and Desai for coming on board. "Let us open a new page," she said, "and try to work together in mutual trust and confidence."[52] She was indeed keen to make a fresh start, but only after settling old scores.

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Indira's calculated moves over the following months would culminate in what many regarded as inconceivable: a formal split in the Indian National Congress. These stemmed from a variety of motivations. In the first place, there was the sheer instinct to survive as prime minister. The old guard's conduct ahead of the elections had effectively put her on notice. But insecurity was now combined with an instinct for power. Indira Gandhi realized that the syndicate had been weakened by their own dismal showing at the hustings. In consequence, she had emerged relatively powerful within the party and needed to use that power before the seniors recovered their nerve. Finally, Indira Gandhi believed that the elections had confirmed that the Congress party in its present avatar was incapable of addressing the rising expectations of the people. As she noted, "we are at a stage of development . . . where the gap between expectations and resources for meeting them is at the widest. Political awareness is also coming up sharply."[53] Many of the historically marginalized groups were becoming politically active and were unwilling to conform to the caste and patronage politics practiced by the regional bosses. Changing the internal character of the Congress party, she concluded, was critical to India's prospects. As she would explain to a friend, "each state boss came to believe that he *was* the state. This is what I have tried to break through."[54]

As the party licked its electoral wounds, Indira Gandhi decided to go for a complete organizational makeover. Thereafter, she lost no opportunity for a face-off with the party grandees. The first such instance was the election of the president of India, which was done by an electoral college comprising members of parliament and state legislatures. President Radhakrishnan had played a pivotal role in piloting Indira Gandhi's ascent to power. Yet, after the general elections, when the idea was mooted of reelecting him for a second term, she refrained from endorsing it. In fact, she had made up her mind not to give him another term.[55]

Radhakrishnan's health was on the decline, and he was unsure of a second innings. At the urging of Kamaraj and others, he eventually told the prime minister that he was prepared to stay on, if needed in the national interest. The prime minister kept up a studied silence. She now favored the candidature of the vice president, Zakir Husain, whose

credentials she pressed on the party. What is more, she reached out to a senior leader of the Swatantra Party and spoke of finding another consensus candidate—beyond Radhakrishnan. Electing the first Muslim president of the republic would not only burnish her secular credentials but also puncture Kamaraj's reputation as kingmaker. The latter prevailed on Radhakrishnan to let him canvass more support, but ultimately the die was cast in favor of Husain.[56] The manner in which Indira Gandhi discarded a highly respected patron presaged her approach to other veterans in the Congress party.

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The shock waves of the general elections rippled out beyond the Congress. As the prime minister maneuvered within the party, she had to deal with the broader political fallout of its poor showing. Its problems were particularly acute in the Hindi-speaking states of north India: the heartland of electoral politics. These states illustrated both the problems of the waning hegemony of the old Congress and the challenges confronting the new alliances knitted together by the other parties. Above all, it underscored a significant new dynamic at work. The increasing competitiveness of electoral politics could destabilize and undermine the rules of the game of parliamentary democracy. This was evident in the parties' attempts to outbid one another in luring legislators with the promise of power and pelf.

Take Uttar Pradesh. In a house of 423, the Congress emerged as the single largest party with 198 seats. The incumbent chief minister, C.B. Gupta, scraped through in his own constituency with the slimmest of margins. He cobbled together a tenuous coalition, pulling the support of several independent candidates, including many rebels from the Congress party. On 12 March 1967, the state's governor invited Gupta to form a ministry and prove his majority in the legislature. However, Gupta was unable to persuade his longstanding rival in the party—Charan Singh—to come on board.[57] The latter instead parleyed with other parties and, in early April, left the Congress with twenty legislators to become the chief minister of the Samyukta Vidhayak Dal (SVD) government.

The SVD coalition in Uttar Pradesh consisted of eight parties and twenty-two independents. Charan Singh's appointment as chief minister

was hardly a reflection of the numbers that his new party (Jan Congress – later Bharatiya Kranti Dal) commanded. Indeed, it was a junior partner in a coalition dominated by the Jana Sangh with ninety-eight legislators and the SSP with forty-four. Charan Singh's primacy in this grouping was owing to his swing position—stemming from his ability to carry along his loyalists in the Congress party. The Jana Sangh, for its part, had racked up an unprecedented number of seats across northern India owing to its role in the cow protection agitation, as well as its pre-poll arrangements with the Socialists and the Swatantra Party. Within the coalition government, however, the Jana Sangh chafed against the restraints on its Hindu nationalist agenda.

The Swatantra Party, led by a Muslim leader from the erstwhile princely state of Rampur, Akhtar Ali, emerged as an unlikely champion of the Muslims' demand to restore Urdu as the second language of the state. The Jana Sangh was stoutly opposed to the idea, as well as to Swatantra's claim that it had accepted this demand prior to the polls. Charan Singh was barely able to check such fractious and contradictory demands. Worse, the deputy chief minister and minister of education from the Jana Sangh, Ram Prakash Gupta, was accused of promoting schools run by the RSS's network. The chief minister was forced to strip the Jana Sangh of the education portfolio—a move that exacerbated these tensions.[58]

Equally neuralgic was the Socialists' call for abolishing land revenue in the state. Although a strong advocate of agrarian interests, Charan Singh regarded this as a populist move—one that would swiftly deplete the state's treasury and leave him incapable of investing in the new agrarian model inaugurated by the Green Revolution. The Socialists also clashed with Charan Singh over their involvement in the "Remove English" movement. Charan Singh kept this rickety coalition running by threatening to resign on no fewer than three occasions. By the summer of 1967, the SVD coalition began to bleed as significant numbers of legislators defected. In mid-February 1968, the coalition fell apart and Charan Singh resigned. Since the Congress was unable to rack up the requisite numbers, Uttar Pradesh came under "president's rule" until elections were held again a year later.[59]

In Bihar, the SVD coalition was dominated by the left: eighty-six Socialists, twenty-eight Communists, and three Swatantra legislators

were joined by twenty-six from the Jana Sangh and some twenty independents. The Communists and the Hindu nationalists clashed over the former's demand for declaring Urdu as the second language of the state. In January 1968, legislators belonging to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes—including three of the latter from Jana Sangh—defected to support a Congress ministry. The latter, in turn, collapsed in two months, leading to the formation of a ragtag coalition that included the Jana Sangh. This ministry, too, caved in under the weight of its own contradictions, leading to the imposition of president's rule in June 1968. As Jana Sangh's Atal Behari Vajpayee observed, the SVD coalitions had "served the purpose for a time of keeping the Congress out of power" but had "achieved nothing else."[60]

Hectic horse-trading was also par for the course in Madhya Pradesh. Vijayaraje Scindia, the dowager queen of the erstwhile princely state of Gwalior, had left the Congress party before the elections—insisting that she should pick the candidates from her region. Not only had she campaigned against the Congress, but after the elections she sought to entice Congress legislators to her parliamentary group. The Congress chief minister, D.P. Mishra, was no slouch in this department. He informed Kamaraj that he was compelled "to open the door for all who wish to join the Party."[61] Mishra was also a close ally of Indira Gandhi's. Yet she was advised to instruct Mishra to seek a dissolution of the assembly and fresh elections. As a close advisor bluntly put it, "nothing is more destructive of the elementary decencies of political life than to put even the slightest premium on floor-crossing. This simply must stop. The only way to stop it is to assert the democratic right of the leader of a party, acknowledged in every country, to advise the Head of the State about dissolution."[62] The prime minister, however, allowed Mishra to undermine norms and continue poaching legislators. That did not prevent her from loftily stating that "the political defections of the kind which have marred our political life have tended to bring democratic processes to disrepute."[63]

In the event, Scindia spirited away thirty-five legislators from the Congress party and brought them into the SVD coalition comprising the Socialists and the Jana Sangh. The ministry was helmed by a dissident Congress leader—Govind Narain Singh—and counted several

former congressmen. Less than a year into its existence, Scindia and the Jana Sangh forced the chief minister to purge his loyalists. In January 1969, Govind Narain Singh brought them back into his cabinet. Two months later, he defected with them wholesale and helped form a Congress government in the state.

The 1967 elections thus set in train a competitive dynamic that loosened the purchase of the rules of the game on the political elites. This trend would accelerate in time and constitute one dimension of a major systemic transformation of Indian politics. Concurrently, change was also underway in the other dimension of the political system: relative institutional power. This, too, was a consequence of the fourth general elections. The Congress party's flickering fortunes in north India was a grave challenge to its dominance of Indian politics. None realized this better than Indira Gandhi. Yet she first had to consolidate her grip over the party and forge it into a sterile and effective instrument of power.

2

RAISING THE STAKES

No sooner did she resume office as prime minister than Indira Gandhi decided she needed a strong, able, and efficient secretariat. The political fiasco that had followed devaluation; the Congress party's poor showing in the general elections; the continued jockeying for power and primacy within the party; the volatility of politics in key states—all convinced her that she needed a prime ministerial office that performed "a wider range of functions." Economic and social policy needed to be integrated and coordinated with political and international considerations. The ability to generate policy ideas had to be matched with the capacity to monitor their implementation and project them in the public realm.[1] This was sensible given her shallow puddle of experience. It also marked the first step in Indira Gandhi's bid to tighten her hold on the government and the party.

The prime minister also decided to replace her secretary L.K. Jha with P.N. Haksar. A career diplomat—then serving as India's deputy high commissioner in London—Haksar was not an obvious candidate for the job. He had little experience or expertise in domestic policy or politics; nor had he worked in the rarefied reaches of the administration in New Delhi. And yet, he commended himself for the role owing to a couple of considerations. In the first place, Indira Gandhi had known him for decades. They had both studied in England in the mid-1930s. In contrast to her desultory pursuit of education, Haksar had been known as a precocious student with omnivorous intellectual interests:

although a mathematician, he had had a keen interest in history and had taken classes with the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski. His pad in Primrose Hill had been a convenient meeting place for Indira Nehru and her then boyfriend, Feroze Gandhi. Called to the bar in Allahabad after the war, Haksar came to the notice of Jawaharlal Nehru, who nudged him towards a career in the new Indian foreign service. All along, Indira Gandhi and Haksar stayed in touch. During his last stint in London, he also maintained an avuncular eye on her sons Rajiv and Sanjay—much to the gratitude of their anxious mother.[2]

Long acquaintance apart, they shared their political leanings. As students, both had partaken of the left, anti-fascist, and anti-imperialist milieu at the peak of the Popular Front in Europe. On returning to India during the war, Haksar was for a while a card-carrying member of the CPI. Their doctrinaire ardor had since cooled, but Indira Gandhi knew that Haksar was deeply committed to the project of a "socialistic" transformation of India initiated by Nehru. Above all, she knew that Haksar had his own mind and spoke bluntly when needed.

Although he didn't hold the requisite rank for the job, Indira Gandhi had him promoted and empowered as secretary to the prime minister.[3] Jha had been unsure whether the prime minister's secretariat should encroach on the functioning of the cabinet secretariat. Haksar had no such qualms. Within weeks of taking office in May 1967, he began systematically to bring under his secretariat's purview an enormous range of administrative, policy, and political matters. Proximity to the prime minister apart, Haksar's power waxed in office owing to his competence, his *ex cathedra* style, and his cultivated sage-like aura.

Haksar's arrival marked the onset of a rapid secretion of power from the cabinet to the prime minister's secretariat. This would prove crucial over the next three years in tilting the balance of power between the prime minister and the party sharply towards the former. Through this period, Haksar also helped Indira Gandhi conspire with the winds and tides of politics—though on these matters her own instincts proved as pointed as any. His principal contribution lay in translating her "socialistic" instincts into a series of high-profile policies, so sharpening her political and ideological arrows for the battle against the party bosses.

On occasion, Indira Gandhi resented his frankness; but on balance, knew that she benefited enormously from his advice.

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After the 1967 elections, the Congress party saw stirrings of ideological dissent. The Congress Forum for Socialist Action, a dormant ginger group, had lately been fortified by an influx of younger politicians and former Socialists, including Chandra Shekhar, Krishan Kant, Mohan Dharia, and Ram Dhan. Billed by the press as the "Young Turks," they proved a useful instrument in Indira Gandhi's struggle with the old guard.

These socialists acquired prominence at the All India Congress Committee (AICC) meeting held at the end of June 1967. Ahead of the conclave, Haksar sent an anodyne memo to the prime minister, suggesting that the draft resolution tabled at the meeting "must reiterate the basic framework of our policies." Never mind if it "amounts to saying the obvious."[4] The "Young Turks" wanted to administer stronger medicine to the party. In practice, it amounted to little more than milk-and-water socialism mingled with a fair dose of vitriol for the old guard, whom they blamed for the party's poor showing. This roused the bile of the syndicate. The prime minister seemed to look askance at their political attack but came out in support of the demand for a leftward turn in economic policy. Then again, she wouldn't dream of letting them set the pace. In consequence, Chandra Shekhar and Dharia came up with a diluted agenda of ten points.[5]

Some of these were hoary tenets of the Congress, long avowed in principle and ignored in practice: implementation of land reforms, expansion of cooperatives, and so forth. Then there were calls for "nationalization" or state takeover of general insurance, import-export trade, and trade in foodgrains. Two points in the charter reflected ideas that had, as we shall see (chapters 4–5), recently come to prominence in the discourse on development: catering to the "minimum needs" of the poor and curbing the concentration of economic power. A couple of key demands stoked controversy. The first was the call for the nationalization of all banks. Finance Minister Desai stoutly opposed this and

was backed by the prime minister. Eventually, they settled for "social control" of banking institutions by better regulation of the credit policies and operations of private banks.

The second was a call for abolishing the "privy purses" and assorted prerogatives—such as royal titles—held by the erstwhile princely rulers of India. These constitutionally guaranteed pensions in perpetuity had been given to 250 rulers (and their progeny) of the larger states when they merged their territories with the union of India. The socialists' contempt for these vestiges of aristocratic privilege were also tinctured with partisanship, for many prominent princes had in recent years joined the Swatantra Party. The old guard was open to doing away with titles but held the privy purses to be an article of faith. The spry "Young Turks" piloted a late-night resolution at the conclave, when the elders had toddled away, calling on the party to abolish privy purses—much to the chagrin of Desai and the syndicate.[6] Nor did Indira Gandhi approve of their effrontery. It had "further added to the complications," she brusquely told Dharia.[7]

The prime minister sought to remain above the fray because she had not assessed the policy and political implications of these demands. Haksar advised her that "the time may not be ripe for P.M. to be in a position to give clear-cut guidance to the public opinion about her own thinking on these subjects."[8] Still, inasmuch as it underscored the ideological and political fault lines in the party, she also signaled her support for the proposed economic program. Thus, at a subsequent AICC session in October 1967, she said there were "no 'ifs' and 'buts' in implementing the Ten-Point Programme and the Government is committed to implementing it in toto. Strategy and timing can be decided by the Government."[9]

This party conclave asked the prime minister and Kamaraj to choose a new Congress president. Indira Gandhi would have preferred an election for the post but was forced yet again into backroom dealing with the old guard. After much back-and-forth, they picked the chief minister of Karnataka, Nijalingappa. A veteran of the syndicate, Nijalingappa promptly proceeded to strengthen and expand it. Atulya Ghosh of West Bengal was brought into the CWC. The differences between Y.B. Chavan, S.K. Patil, and Morarji Desai were patched up—

notwithstanding the machinations of Indira loyalists like I.K. Gujral to scuttle this effort. The Uttar Pradesh Congress, despite its own disarray, squared up behind the syndicate. The party was bolstering its power vis-à-vis the prime minister.

All this led Haksar to conclude in early 1968 that the situation was "difficult and dangerous" and the political prognosis "somewhat grim, if not dim." The political remedy lay, he went on, "in forging wider progressive alliances under your more effective personal lead." This suggestion reflected their shared experience of the popular fronts in 1930s Europe when center-left parties coalesced against the right. He urged the prime minister "to project more assertively your own ideological image directly on the people over the heads of your colleagues and partymen in the tradition of your father." She was still regarded by many as the "last safeguard to protect" the Nehruvian legacy. Indira Gandhi hardly needed convincing on this score. Unlike her father, though, she sought at once to establish a direct connection with the populace and to slash the party's trammels on her power. In so doing, she crafted a distinctive, Caesarist politics. Haksar warned her that time was of the essence: "a maximum of six months within which the Syndicate is now out to take over more completely both the party machine and the Establishment."[10]

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Haksar's assessment was not off-beam. By early 1968, Kamaraj and Desai had concluded that they had to unseat Indira Gandhi. But they were hamstrung by the Congress president's unwillingness to move so boldly against her. As Nijalingappa noted in his diary, the prime minister's resignation under duress would "break the party and the whole country would be in chaos." Yet within months he was sufficiently riled by her refusal to accord any weight to the party chief and her transparent attempt to project her own image above the party. He now concluded that "she did not deserve to continue in office and had to be removed."[11] Nijalingappa's own standing was buttressed by the return to parliament of Kamaraj and S.K. Patil. In his presidential address at the party's annual convention, Nijalingappa tore into the government's economic policies, castigating the public sector enterprises for their

"inefficiency and failure to make profits." The stunned silence was ruptured by the young socialists' attempt to table motions censuring the president: a move that he, of course, ruled out of order. Indira Gandhi was "greatly agitated."[12] She had little choice but to defend herself in a combative rejoinder. Cheered on by her young supporters, she declared that her policies would be dictated by the "need to preserve the paramountcy of India's political and economic interests."[13]

Ambushed by her adversaries, Indira Gandhi returned fire by sharpening the ideological divide and striking a more radical note on economic policy. "Perhaps you would like to see," she told captains of the industry, "obedience to the laws of market economy in the hope that it would help to produce wealth and that wealth so produced would ultimately reach down to the people." That proposition was no longer tenable. Indeed, the situation in India was "qualitatively different from what it was anytime before . . . There is a stirring of consciousness that riches and poverty are not God's creation but man's." Furthermore, there was a "restlessness of spirit, and a revolt against unimplemented declarations and hypocrisy."[14]

Ahead of the next Congress session in July 1969, the prime minister's secretariat pulled together a "Note on Economic Policy and Programme." She had it circulated among the delegates, maintaining that these were "just some stray thoughts rather hurriedly dictated." It was, in fact, calculated to highlight and accentuate the differences between her and the party's old guard on economic and social policies. In going beyond the ten-point manifesto of 1967, this note also displayed an alertness to the more radical currents coursing through the country. In a nod to Naxalbari, it stated that "Land reform is no less important. If we do not act urgently, grave political and economic problems will arise."[15] The party elders sought, however, to tame these ideas by embracing them. The CWC endorsed the note in "its entirety" and asked the government to implement it. None less than Morarji Desai commended the resolution incorporating these ideas to the party, which swiftly adopted it.[16]

Haksar now urged the prime minister to stand more distinctly on the left: the political struggle against the syndicate had to take a more pronounced ideological turn.[17] The "fundamental and root cause" of the

"widespread discontent, often leading to violence," he argued, lay in the extraordinary inequalities of Indian society. Conflict was stoked by the evident "contrast between dire poverty of millions and the riches of the few." What the country needed was "a cooperative society by which we mean socialism." Haksar asked Indira Gandhi to "reiterate her faith in a socialist society alone being able to solve the problems of our country." At the same time, she should also convey her "anxiety about producing bureaucratic state capitalism in the name of nationalization." All told, the balance between ideological hope and practical concern tilted towards the former. Haksar impaled it upon a lofty philosophical insight: "the moral purpose behind socialism is essential not merely for our country but for advancing humanity to the next stage of development." Prosaic reality could not altogether be avoided. A "realistic approach," he advised, would entail devoting the next couple of years to improving the efficiency of "existing public sector enterprises" and only then "proceed[ing] to enlarge the public sector to important financial institutions like banks and insurance companies."

Proclaiming socialism and practicing gradualism had a respectable pedigree in the Congress party harking back to Jawaharlal Nehru. But Indira Gandhi's imperiled political situation pushed her further and faster in the direction of "bureaucratic state capitalism." In the ruck of the political battle, the consigliere himself would cast aside these forebodings.

Indira Gandhi now began systematically moving against her opponents. A year and a half ago, Haksar had advised her to cut Desai to size by appointing two more deputy premiers. Having stayed her hand for months, she struck hard. The prime minister summarily stripped Desai of the finance portfolio, insisting that it was necessary for the "immediate implementation" of the AICC resolution on economic policies. As a "disciplined member of the Congress Party," she wrote to Desai, he would have gone along with the decisions taken. However, mere acceptance was "not sufficient for giving assurance to the public that implementation will receive the whole-hearted support of the man at the helm." She also felt that "in the interest of the country" he should devote his "attention to a variety of problems in your capacity as Deputy Prime Minister." Indira Gandhi knew full well that Desai would not

stomach this bitter admixture of humiliation and condescension. When he sent his resignation as deputy premier, she lost no time in unctuously replying that she had "clung to the hope that . . . you would not feel my taking over of the Finance portfolio was a matter of such cardinal importance as to necessitate parting which is painful to all of us. But now I must bear the responsibility and leave the judgement of rightness to history."[18]

As she prepared to dispatch Desai, Indira Gandhi was keen to avoid conveying the impression that this was purely personal. So, the maneuver for power was decked in the bunting of ideologically dyed policies. The prime minister decided to nationalize the banking industry. Barely a week earlier, Haksar had advised her that such a step could wait a couple of years. This was entirely consonant with her own thinking ever since the issue had been pushed to the fore by the "Young Turks" in 1967. Desai, Kamaraj, and the old guard were also for "social control" of banks. Precisely for this reason, she now felt impelled to make the radical move of taking over the private banks at one swoop.

On 16 July, Haksar consulted a couple of trusted economists. K.N. Raj, veteran of the Planning Commission and director of the Delhi School of Economics, supported the idea but thought it needed six months of preparation best done in secret. P.N. Dhar, who would join the prime minister's secretariat in December 1970, felt that the move was "a powerful weapon in the factional fight against the Syndicate" but had to be accompanied by other measures to accelerate growth.[19] The following day Haksar got down to the plumbing of the banking systems and the minutiae of banking statistics. D.N. Ghosh, an official in the banking division of the finance ministry, was summoned to ensure that he was "fully briefed on a subject that was entirely foreign to him." Haksar was particularly concerned as to whether they could prepare the ordinance for nationalization in two days. The next morning, the prime minister herself met Ghosh and was relieved to learn that a draft ordinance for nationalizing some five banks had been lying around since 1963 and could be quickly repurposed for a wholesale takeover by the state.[20] By going in for an ordinance, rather than tabling a bill in parliament, which was due to convene presently, the prime minister sought to showcase it as *her* executive decision—not that of the party or parliament.

Late in the evening of 19 July 1969, Indira Gandhi took to the radio and announced the nationalization of banks. She explained her decision as spurred by the imperative for greater financial inclusion, especially for the poorer sections: "To millions of small farmers, artisans and other self-employed persons, a bank can be a source of credit, which is the very basis for any effort to improve their meagre economic lot." To assuage the concerns of the businesses, Indian and international, she was emphatic that "it is not the beginning of a new era of nationalisation." She assured "all sections of trade and industry that legitimate needs for credit will be safeguarded."[21] Against the backcloth of dull economic stagnation, the announcement sparked considerable enthusiasm. Indira Gandhi's loyalists gathered the throngs into massive rallies outside her official residence. The syndicate was forced to shelve its plans to censure her for the summary dismissal of Desai.

Indira Gandhi would brook no restraint, however. She adroitly positioned this move as emblematic of the ideological gulf that separated her from the old guard of the Congress party. As she wrote to Desai, knowing full well that their correspondence would soon be public, "each one of us comes to be identified with certain basic approaches, attitudes, values, philosophy and world outlooks" and when these were of "decisive significance" on crucial questions like economic development, "a change of personalities concerned with the implementation of the new policies becomes unavoidable."[22] The decks were clear for a showdown.

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Echoing the moves of 1967, the opening salvoes were fired in the election of the president of India. President Zakir Husain had died in harness on 3 May 1969 and Vice President V.V. Giri had taken over as interim president. At the AICC session, it became clear that Nijalingappa and his associates had chosen to nominate Sanjiva Reddy—speaker of parliament and a fully paid-up member of the syndicate—as the official candidate of the party. When the Congress Parliamentary Board met on 12 July 1969, Indira Gandhi suggested an alternative candidate: the respected leader of the scheduled castes, Jagjivan Ram. To her chagrin, even the home minister, Y.B. Chavan, failed to support her idea. In the

event, Reddy's candidature was announced after a split vote. The following day, Vice President Giri declared his intention to enter the contest. Without concealing her displeasure, Indira Gandhi formally filed the papers for Reddy's nomination.

Against the Congress party's candidate, Sanjiva Reddy, the opposition parties jointly fielded the veteran C.D. Deshmukh. With Vice President Giri also in the fray, the contest was keenly watched. Although Indira Gandhi had formally supported Reddy's nomination, it became clear that she favored Giri. The prime minister was not just unwilling to stand by the collective decision of the party but acting explicitly against it. This extraordinary and egregious disregard of the norms of the parliamentary system was rationalized by Haksar. The constitution, he argued, envisaged a "special relationship" between the president and the prime minister. Hence, it was "the Prime Minister and not the [Parliamentary] Board" which must have the "decisive voice in the selection of the President." Indeed, in going against her wishes, the Parliamentary Board wanted "to set up a different pattern of Central Government under which their nominee, if elected, would be their stooge and consult them and not the Prime Minister." It followed that the board was "in violation of the spirit of the constitution."[23] The 1967 elections had marked the onset of a widespread willingness to play fast and loose with the rules of the game, but Indira Gandhi's actions during the presidential election of 1969 displayed a contemptuous disregard for them in the highest reaches of the government, so accelerating their erosion.

Nijalingappa sought to preempt her by covertly reaching out to the two conservative opposition parties, Swatantra and Jana Sangh, canvassing their second votes in the electoral college for Reddy. Informed of this maneuver by a political confidant, D.P. Mishra, Indira Gandhi asked what would happen if Reddy were elected. Mishra bluntly replied, "Then you would go."[24] Soon, her loyalists began denouncing Nijalingappa and the syndicate. On 14 August, three days before the ballot, the prime minister openly called for "conscience voting"—a euphemism that exhorted Congress legislators to defy the party's whip. When the results were called, Giri had edged in with a wafer-thin margin. The political symbolism of this outcome was not lost on anyone: Indira Gandhi had put the party bosses on notice.

Thereafter, the prime minister and the party president were engaged in an epistolary duel that continued for weeks. Aware that their missives were promptly reproduced in the press, Haksar carefully vetted her replies. While insisting that the confrontation turned on the "fundamental principles" of parliamentary government, he advised, she should make it amply clear that "it is no use pretending that everything is all right with our party and that we can solve all our problems . . . by mechanical repetition of slogans like 'unity', 'discipline' etc."[25]

Indeed, Indira Gandhi had already asked her followers to submit a "requisition" for a special meeting of the AICC to elect a new party president. Unsure of his own position in the CWC, Nijalingappa eased out two of her close associates. She retaliated by sacking junior ministers close to the syndicate. After days of feline maneuvering, Nijalingappa announced on 12 November 1969 the expulsion of Indira Gandhi from the party and asked the parliamentary party to elect a new leader. The prime minister was expecting this. She had already asked Haksar to seek advice on her legal position. He told her that "our Constitution makes no reference to political parties at all." As long as the prime minister (and her cabinet) had the confidence of the lower house and did not lose a vote of confidence, she could continue in office—never mind her position in the party.[26]

Fortified by this advice, Indira Gandhi rallied her own supporters. Not only did she manage to secure the loyalty of her senior cabinet ministers, including Chavan, who had previously dithered, but she carried with her a majority of Congress members of parliament: 220 from the Lok Sabha and 90 from the Rajya Sabha—leaving only 119 of 429 MPs with the syndicate and Desai. At the subsequent meeting of the AICC requisitioned by her, 446 of the 705 members were present. Congress (R—Requisitionist) had a clear lead over Congress (O—Organization). In a move that burnished her radical credentials, Jagjivan Ram, the prominent Dalit leader, was elected president of the new Congress.[27]

Indira Gandhi portrayed the split as spurred by a combination of "all the forces of reaction and vested interest" and declared: "We have to fight against these."[28] She heralded, by way of contrast, her own "radical programme." Here was a manifesto of the pro-poor policies she would

seek to pursue over the following years.[29] "The weaker and backward sections of the nation," she noted, "have been coming forward to participate on an increasing scale in the mainstream of national life." And yet, per capita income had "not increased as planned and the level of actual consumption of the poorest sections of our people remains extremely low." Inequality had increased as the "rich have become richer" and "a section of the capitalist class has been able to establish monopoly control." The countryside was rife with inequality of class and caste: tillers of the soil did not have tenurial security and Dalits continued to be oppressed. What is more, the "spectre of unemployment or underemployment is continuing to haunt the people," especially the educated youth.

There was no "magic formula or gimmick" to redress this situation. Rather it called for sustained national effort. The nationalization of banks was the first step. A host of other policies were on the anvil: expansion of public procurement to ensure fair prices for farmers; legislation for curbing industrial monopolies and reviewing the licensing system; barring the entry of big business to consumer goods manufacturing; reviewing foreign collaborations and joint ventures; restrictions on individual holdings of urban property; and curbing inflation of essential commodities.

The political fizz from the uncorking of this radical agenda proved important in another way. Indira Gandhi and the Congress (R) were forty-five seats short of majority in the Lok Sabha. Apart from wooing assorted independents, she reached out to the DMK and the CPI. The DMK's support was ensured by promises of increased central government financing and the setting up of a steel plant in Tamil Nadu. The CPI, for its part, was still smarting from the 1964 rupture and had lost ground in the key states of West Bengal and Kerala. Indira Gandhi's economic agenda, following the Congress split, seemed progressive. The party agreed to support her minority government provided she committed herself to the economic policy agenda. Apart from the policies she had adumbrated, they also wanted nationalization of wholesale trade in foodgrains and removal of the privy purses given to the former princes.[30]

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The demand for the abolition of privy purses and titles had been adopted as a resolution of the AICC in July 1967. In the turbulent politics of the following years, Indira Gandhi had sought to avoid rocking the boat and antagonizing the princes—many of whom remained politically influential. Now, in order to buff the prime minister's progressive credentials, the new Congress (R) adopted a resolution in December 1969 to abolish privy purses and privileges.

Then again, Indira Gandhi and her advisors were unsure whether they could muster the requisite two-thirds majority in both houses of parliament to get the constitution amendment bill passed. In the event, the bill sailed through the Lok Sabha but failed to carry by a single vote in the Rajya Sabha. After a quick huddle with her cabinet, the prime minister got the president of India to issue a proclamation "derecognizing" the princely order and quashing their purses and privileges. The princes promptly moved the supreme court. The bill tabled in the parliament had, in fact, sought to obviate such a move by placing the older settlement with the princes beyond the purview of judicial scrutiny. During the debate, Indira Gandhi had pointedly said that the older agreements were "political settlements" and that "such settlements are matters which must be subject to the final arbitration of Parliament and not of courts."[31]

The higher judiciary was not minded to agree with this division of labor. Indeed, both the moves made by Indira Gandhi to showcase her progressive credentials, bank nationalization and abolition of privy purses, came a cropper in the courts. The day after Indira Gandhi announced the nationalization of banks in July 1969, petitions were filed in the supreme court. They challenged the president's competence to promulgate the ordinance and claimed that their rights, especially to property and to compensation for property taken by the state, had been violated. The government argued that nationalization was a policy decision and hence not open to judicial scrutiny. Even as the court reserved its judgment for several months, the government was determined to press ahead. Although the matter was *sub judice*, a bank nationalization law, replacing the ordinance, was passed by the parliament on 4 August.

Six months later, the supreme court pronounced on this law. An overwhelming majority (ten of eleven judges on the bench) struck it down, holding that the principles of compensation in the legislation

were open to judicial review.[32] The prime minister responded by promulgating a new ordinance and introducing a new bill in parliament—one that was drafted carefully to incorporate the court's main objections.[33] The bill passed through parliament and bucked further judicial scrutiny.

On privy purses, the princes had moved the court, arguing that the president had no power to withdraw the recognition accorded to a ruler, and that it violated their fundamental rights, especially to property in the form of privy purses. As in parliament, the government held in the court that the privy purses flowed from political agreements. In rescinding them, the president was exercising sovereign political power and the government's prerogative to modify its political obligations in keeping with state policy. The courts had no jurisdiction in such political matters.

On 15 December 1970, the supreme court ruled against the presidential order. The majority verdict also held that the obligation to pay the privy purses was absolute and could not be altered even by the parliament. Having seized the initiative by splitting the party, the prime minister found herself stymied by the judiciary.

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Meanwhile, the political situation in key states remained volatile. Prominent among these was West Bengal. A solid bastion of the Congress party for two decades, Bengal had witnessed a dramatic surge of the communists in 1967. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) had emerged as the strongest of the parliamentary communist parties. A coalition government comprising the CPI (M) and the breakaway Bangla Congress had lasted only seven months before president's rule had been imposed on the state.

When elections were held in 1969, the CPI (M)'s tally rose to eighty seats, paving the way for another coalition government led by Bangla Congress chief Ajoy Mukherjee, as chief minister, and CPI (M) leader Jyoti Basu as his deputy. Back in power, the CPI (M) deployed its control over the police and land revenue bureaucracy to embark on a campaign against entrenched rural power. The locus of this power were landlords who were also moneylenders and controlled the trade in foodgrains. The government began seizing lands that these grandees

were alleged to have taken over fraudulently. Further, the landlords were compelled to restrict their claims on sharecroppers to the legal limit. Finally, the state sheared their de facto police powers in the villages. The cumulative effect was a remarkable consolidation of the CPI (M)'s standing in rural Bengal.

New Delhi followed these developments with mounting concern. The prime minister believed that the Communists had come to power solely because of "the split in the state Congress."[34] In September 1969, she appointed Shanti Swaroop Dhavan—lawyer, jurist, diplomat—as governor of West Bengal. Dhavan's principal qualifications for the job were his proximity to Haksar and his reliable anti-communism. The governor proved more royalist than the queen. Even before taking office in Calcutta, he told Haksar that the CPI (M) was putting together a 50,000-strong volunteer force to "thwart all conspiracies against the [coalition] government"—including, we may assume, conspiracies cooked up in the national capital. He wanted the prime minister personally to intercede with Jyoti Basu and snip this plan.[35] In the event, the coalition government limped on until July 1970 when Dhavan dissolved the assembly and imposed central rule.

The gnarled politics of Uttar Pradesh proved more neuralgic for the prime minister. In the midterm elections of February 1969, the Congress party finished with 211 of 424 seats in the state legislature—just 3 shy of a majority. Supported by independents and five members of Swatantra, a Congress ministry led by C.B. Gupta returned to power. As ever, the upper castes—especially Brahmins—were overrepresented in the UP Congress's legislative party and the ministry. Charan Singh's strategy of focusing on an agrarian coalition centered on the rising peasantry and the backward castes paid off handsomely. His party, the Bharatiya Kranti Dal (BKD), soared to ninety-eight seats from twenty-one. However, these gains came mostly at the expense of his erstwhile allies in the SVD coalition: the Jana Sangh dropped to forty-nine from ninety-eight seats and the Samyukta Socialist Party to thirty-three from forty-four seats.[36]

The great schism in the grand old party cracked the UP Congress. In November 1969, the senior Brahmin leader Kamalapati Tripathi took his followers—including sixteen ministers in Gupta's cabinet—to Indira Gandhi's Congress (R). As congressmen sallied back and forth between

these factions, Gupta clung to power with failing fingers. The stalwart of the Congress party now accused New Delhi of neglecting the state's development and criticized the prime minister for ensuring that "there is no place for anyone who chooses to disagree."[37] Notwithstanding the opposition parties' demands, the governor declined to ask Gupta to prove his majority in the legislature. The governor's forbearance evidently reflected the prime minister's inability to pull the cat's cradle of UP politics into a congenial pattern.

By early February 1970, Gupta knew the game was up. In a preemptive strike at Indira's Congress, he offered his support to Charan Singh and asked the latter to stake a claim to power with the backing of the Jana Sangh and the Socialists. Singed by his "unhappy experience" of heading an SVD coalition government a year ago, however, Charan Singh refused to rise to the bait.[38]

Tripathi, by contrast, was raring to take the bit between his teeth. With 136 legislators in his tent, the glittering prize of chief ministership seemed his for the taking. And yet, his reach turned out to exceed his grasp. In an early sign of the new party's functioning, Indira Gandhi tamped down his expectations and offered to support a ministry led by Charan Singh. What's more, the covert negotiations with Charan Singh were conducted by her loyalist, D.P. Mishra of Madhya Pradesh.[39] Charan Singh was admittedly reluctant to return to office as the head of a motley crew, but his ambition was easily stoked by the prime minister's overture.[40] Indira Gandhi had her own reason for this puzzling move. She sought eventually to pull Charan Singh and his supporters into her fold, so cementing her position against the old Congress in this crucial state. Charan Singh took office in mid-February 1970. Two months later, he inducted Tripathi and other congressmen into his ministry.

In office, Charan Singh found it difficult to resist Indira Gandhi's blandishments. She bore down on him to merge with her party, holding out the implicit threat of pulling the rug from under him. On 11 June 1970, he would recall, "Indira Gandhi sent for me and told me point-blank that, unless B.K.D. merged in New Congress . . . State government was likely to be toppled and Presidential Rule imposed."[41] Charan Singh's concern was not just clinging to power but securing the loyalties of his own followers against the lures of office. A few days on, he wrote

a remonstrative missive to Indira Gandhi, conceding that "an overwhelming proportion of leading men at the State level were in favor of merger" but insisting that grassroots party workers were not.[42] At the end of August, the BKD's national executive formally decided to reject a merger with Congress (R).

The inevitable break was precipitated by Charan Singh's decision to have three of his MPs in the Rajya Sabha vote against the bill to abolish privy purses. Tripathi wrote an ill-tempered letter, accusing Charan Singh of a breach of faith and terming the vote as the "last straw," owing to which "support by the Congress Party to your Government had become well-nigh impossible."[43] Anticipating a blast of prime ministerial ire, Charan Singh asked for the resignation of the Congress ministers in his government. The Congress (R) retaliated by withdrawing support for his government and seeking to draw some BKD members into its ranks. Meanwhile, the governor of the state, in stark contrast to his earlier approach, demanded Charan Singh's resignation. In a farcical twist, C.B. Gupta's Congress (O) and the Jana Sangh offered their support to Charan Singh, who was now willing to clutch at straws. After the debacle over privy purses, Indira Gandhi had no time for constitutional niceties. She got President Giri, who was touring the Soviet Union, to sign a decree temporarily suspending the state assembly. But she was unable further to maneuver the situation to her advantage. At length, all her rivals banded together to form a new coalition government under the leadership of a nonentity acceptable to everyone: T.N. Singh. The last SVD government would remain in place for just six months.

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The general elections were not due until 1972. But Indira Gandhi was concerned about the coalescing political opposition. Moreover, the supreme court seemed to stand athwart her attempt to inaugurate a new policy regime. The solution to both these challenges pointed in the same direction: renewing her democratic mandate. On Christmas Day 1970 she asked Haksar: "In what precise manner the Lok Sabha is to be dissolved?"[44]

Indira Gandhi's thinking was shaped by her political advisors, but the decision immediately to dissolve parliament and go for elections

was hers. It was undoubtedly a gamble, albeit a calculated one. By calling the general elections a year ahead of schedule, she sought to break the synchronicity between national and state-level elections, so ensuring that the polls would be focused solely on her and the policies she espoused. Here, she agreed with the assessment of D.P. Mishra: "If the elections for the Lok Sabha are . . . held along with the election to the State Legislatures, the unpopularity of the State Governments would water down your own popularity." By the same token, if Lok Sabha elections were held separately, "Your appeal to our people all over India to help you strengthen the Central Government will find an echo in the hearts of the people."[45] The elections were thus seen as a crucial moment in the construction of a Caesarist regime resting on direct popular acclamation. On 27 December, the prime minister announced early parliamentary elections. Explaining the unusual move as spurred by the "opposition of vested interests" and "reactionary forces" to her progressive economic policies, she said: "Power in a democracy resides with the people. That is why we have decided to go to our people and to seek a fresh mandate from them."[46] This set the plebiscitary tone for the elections.

Her party's manifesto held out a "genuine radical programme of social and economic development": championing the interests of the "great bulk of India's poor . . . small and marginal farmers and the landless," the urban "lower and middle income groups," "small industry," and the unemployed. With considerable chutzpah, the incumbent prime minister presented herself as an insurgent candidate up against a battery of entrenched elites: "Conservative elements inside the Congress"; "The alliance of reaction, composed of the Syndicate, Jana Sangh and the Swatantra Party, backed by vested interests"; the Socialists who had joined this "unprincipled alliance"—a move that "revealed not only their negative and destructive role but also the hollowness of their professed socialism." Indira Gandhi also presented herself as the guardian of all religious minorities against the "dark and evil forces of Right reaction . . . preaching religious fanaticism, racial supremacy and chauvinism."[47]

Reminding the electorate of the chaotic reign of coalition governments since 1967, Indira Gandhi promised "a strong and stable Government committed to radical policies." Yet she also made it clear

that there was "no intention of abolishing the institution of private property." Her Congress sought a democratic mandate to ensure that "judicial pronouncements" did not halt the "nation's progress": the party would "seek further constitutional remedies and amendments as are necessary to overcome the impediments in the path of social justice."

The opposition cobbled together a "Grand Alliance" consisting of the Congress (O), Jana Sangh, Swatantra, the Socialists, and the regional parties. On paper this was a strong coalition, but it had none of the new Congress's frisson. The Congress (O)'s manifesto blandly declared, "WE WILL MASTER THE CRISIS." But the crisis was presented as purely the making of the prime minister, whose "Unprincipled Politics of Survival . . . a new style of politics . . . [was] distorting and damaging the democratic framework of our polity." For the rest, the old guard offered itself as all things to everybody and more of the same.[48] This effectively played into the hands of Indira Gandhi. For she was intent on presenting the upcoming poll as a referendum on her. Asked by *Newsweek* to outline the issues in play in the elections, she promptly replied, "I am the issue."[49] The Grand Alliance's campaign slogan similarly miscued. Their "*Indira Hatao*" or "Remove Indira" led Indira Gandhi to respond with: "*Garibi Hatao*" or "Remove Poverty."

She campaigned like a whirlwind, travelling 36,000 miles in 43 days, addressing no fewer than 300 rallies and some 20 million people. Not only did she pull the crowds, but the framing and content of her message struck home. "It was wonderful to see the light in their eyes," she wrote to a friend with evident satisfaction. Indira Gandhi also sensed that she had managed to connect with voters in a unique fashion: "Each person really feels that I am communicating with him."[50]

Seasoned electoral observers remained a tad skeptical of her appeal. As the political scientist Rajni Kothari noted of his tribe, "Most of them still continued to think in terms of the role of caste and religious appeals, of local and parochial factors, the importance of money in buying over blocks of voters."[51] Indira Gandhi, by contrast, had come round to the view that with rising electoral participation and expectations, the older patterns of political mobilization and representation had come unstuck. The plasticity of this social world enabled new modes of popular politics, electoral Caesarism being hers.

The Congress (R) campaign focused exclusively on Indira Gandhi. Massive, garishly painted billboards with her image came up in the main thoroughfares of cities and towns. Badges bearing her picture were distributed in villages and pinned to the dresses of women and men alike. Watching the campaign from Ajmer in Rajasthan, V.S. Naipaul was struck by the new style. "I am not working for [the candidate] Bishweshwar," Congress (R) campaigners openly avowed: "I am working for Indira." Even on polling day, he was told, "The people aren't voting for Bishweshwar. They're voting for Indira." By many accounts, her popular appeal turned on two qualities that voters perceived: her courage in taking on the old establishment and her desire to improve the lot of the poor. As Naipaul observed, she was widely described as "that formidable lady in New Delhi . . . who had abolished the consensus politics of the Congress . . . declared war on privilege." A cab driver similarly explained that she had "shown guts" by nationalizing the banks and giving "the money boys a bit of her mind": "That means she has the courage. And [will] do something for us."[52]

In the event, Indira Gandhi won sensationally. Her party, Congress (R), finished with 352 of 518 seats in the lower house. The next-largest party, the CPI (M), garnered a pitiable 25. Indira Gandhi's victory was as commanding over her allies as her opponents. The CPI stood at 23. The only ally that held its own was the DMK in Tamil Nadu. As for the opposition, the outcome was an unmitigated disaster. The Congress (O) took 16 seats, while the Jana Sangh managed just 13. The latter's performance, in fact, was strongest in areas where it had the backing of erstwhile princes who had flocked to it after the clash over privy purses. The RSS's much-vaunted network of volunteers proved incapable of stemming the tide. Equally significant was the rout of the candidates supported by big businesses. Naval Tata could not make it in the city of Bombay; Krishan Kant Birla was routed in his home constituency in Rajasthan; press baron Ramnath Goenka scraped through in Madhya Pradesh, mainly owing to the support of the dowager queen of Scindia. Indira Gandhi's appeal had proved effective in every way. Her Congress had apparently found another way to overcome the crisis of representation in Indian democracy.

In his report on the fifth general elections, the chief election commissioner, the head of an independent constitutional office, waxed eloquent about its alleged lessons—confirming incidentally that the absence of checks and balances can be as much of a problem in prose as in politics:

> the people of this country have awoken, after about a quarter of a century since Independence, from their deep slumber . . . They have realised that they go to the polling station not simply to put a mark on some piece of paper but that they are doing so in the hope and belief that those for whom they are putting the mark, will do something to alleviate the pains and pangs of their poverty.[53]

In any event, the outcome was exactly what Indira Gandhi had sought when she had gambled in going for an early election. As a chastened Kothari put it, "The political executive need not depend any more on old-style party bosses . . . Nor does it have to depend on other parties in Parliament . . . Finally it can also be free of pressures from the peripheral radicals within and outside the party." The obverse of all this was that "the government is left with no more alibis for not fulfilling what it has said it wants to."[54]

Haksar came to much the same conclusion as he drew up a list of ministers Indira Gandhi could induct into her cabinet—a move that also underlined how powerful the prime minister's office had become. In the recent elections, he argued, "the class-line has dominated the caste-line; that is to say, even in respect of candidates from the same caste standing from opposing platforms, people have voted for that candidate belonging to a party which seeks social change and seeks to mitigate the condition of the poorer classes." The selection of the cabinet must, therefore, "mirror the political upheaval which is taking place in the country." Ministers could no longer stick like barnacles to their posts. The prime minister should "impress upon the Ministers that hereafter their performance will be judged. They will have to show results and would be accountable for their failures." "P.M.'s accountability," he added, "will be total and absolute."[55] The hour of Caesarism had struck.

3

WAR AND PEACE

The morning after she was sworn in as prime minister, Indira Gandhi had an important cable, transmitted via intelligence channels, on her desk. It had come from India's deputy high commissioner in Dhaka, the capital of East Pakistan. The cable conveyed a "special appeal for help at this critical hour" from Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the leader of the Awami League—the main political party in the Bengali-dominant eastern wing of Pakistan. The Pakistan army was flying two and a half divisions into East Pakistan. Mujib wanted India to intercept these aircrafts. "East Pakistan has gone to the point of no return," he insisted.[1]

Only a few months earlier, the Awami League had emerged as the single largest party in the first general elections held in Pakistan. These elections had also cast into relief the yawning divide between East Pakistan and the dominant western wing of the country. The military regime in Pakistan, led by General Yahya Khan, had no intention of handing the keys of the national parliament to Mujib. To gull the Bengali masses who thronged to him, the regime went through the charade of negotiations prior to proroguing the assembly. By 19 March 1971, preparations for a military crackdown in East Pakistan were apparently underway.

New Delhi had been keeping a weather eye on the developing situation. In the midst of a hectic election campaign, the prime minister had tasked a small committee of senior bureaucrats to "examine the issue of giving help to Bangla Desh and give their assessment." If the

Awami League unilaterally declared an independent Bangladesh, should India recognize it? Further, what were the potential political, economic, and military implications of assisting the liberation movement?[2] Yet continuing negotiations between Mujib and Yahya Khan confounded New Delhi's assessment. Indeed, when reports of a massive military operation in and around Dhaka trickled in on 26 March 1971, Indira Gandhi and her advisors felt it might be a show of force to cow the Bengalis. In the event, the crisis acquired dimensions that would have beggared belief. Within months, nearly 10 million Bengali refugees would enter India fleeing the Pakistan army. Before the year ended, India would go to war to create an independent Bangladesh.

In the aftermath of the war, Indira Gandhi would be credited with exceptional foresight, impeccable timing, and unerring judgment—all of which would add to her political charisma. Yet her handling of the developing situation was more tentative and improvisatory. This was her first major international crisis. Besides, she was mindful that her father's political standing had shrunk owing to his disastrous handling of China in 1962. Her instinctive caution was reinforced by Haksar. Although their sympathies lay with the Bengalis, Indira Gandhi and Haksar believed that "India, as a state, has to walk warily." Pakistan was a member of the United Nations: "interference in events internal to Pakistan will not earn us either understanding or good-will from the majority of nation-states." Until such time as Mujib and his colleagues were able to establish their legitimacy, the international community was unlikely to accord recognition to Bangladesh. All things considered, India had to "treat our path as a State, with a great deal of circumspection and not allow our feelings to get the better of us." From the outset, the prime minister was aware that there would be considerable parliamentary and public pressure on the government to do something. To avoid being painted into a corner, she met the leaders of the opposition parties on the evening of 26 March and explained her thinking. She also requested that the government's policy on this matter "should not become a subject matter of public debate."[3]

The parliament was in high dudgeon over the next three days. The foreign minister, Swaran Singh, told the houses that the government was "gravely concerned" at the developments in East Pakistan and that

"our hearts go out in sympathy to the people who are undergoing great suffering."[4] The tepid tone of his remarks was sharply censured, and the opposition demanded a clearer statement of intent. The prime minister had to intervene and assure the parliament that "we are fully alive to the situation." "At the same time," she insisted, "we have to follow proper international norms." Underlining her cautious approach, she held that "a wrong step, a wrong word, can have an effect entirely different from the one that we all just [*sic*] intend." She reiterated that "it would not be wise if this becomes a matter for public debate."[5]

Truth be told, the government was struggling to control the public narrative. Several political parties, including the local unit of Congress (R), organized demonstrations outside the Pakistan embassy in New Delhi. Similar protests were held in Calcutta. Public meetings involving academics, intellectuals, and students were organized across the country, condemning the military crackdown. A cohort of students even met the prime minister and demanded full support to the people of East Bengal. Indira Gandhi realized that this issue could rejuvenate the opposition that had gone comatose after the crushing defeat in the hustings. To contain parliamentary and public opinion she moved a resolution in the parliament on 31 March, strongly criticizing the military action, demanding an end to the violence "which amounts to genocide," and promising "whole hearted sympathy and support" for the people of "East Bengal."[6] Indian policy on the crisis began to take shape within this cautious framework.

In early April 1971, Indira Gandhi met a senior Awami League leader, Tajuddin Ahmad, who had escaped the military dragnet and reached Calcutta. She did not touch upon the question of recognition but offered support for the liberation struggle—though the magnitude of the assistance remained to be worked out. More important, she allowed the Awami Leaguers who had reached India to proclaim a Provisional Government of Bangladesh. Soon, the question of formally recognizing this entity came to the fore. Haksar felt that such recognition could only be given if the liberation movement demonstrated its ability to take on the Pakistan army and gain the upper hand in the civil war. The foreign ministry took a different view. It felt that recognition should not be withheld for long: if the liberation war proved to be a prolonged affair, the leadership would pass to the extreme left. But

India should grant recognition only after ensuring that at least two or more powers would simultaneously do so.[7] However, the prime minister and the foreign minister preferred to move gingerly.

Pressure for recognition began to mount outside the government. Several political parties passed resolutions demanding immediate recognition of Bangladesh. Legislative assemblies in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Assam, Nagaland, and Tripura adopted resolutions urging the central government to formally recognize Bangladesh. The opposition parties castigated the prime minister's stance as vacillating and complacent and equated it with her father's alleged pusillanimity in acquiescing to the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1950. More uncomfortable was the demand for recognition from Congress's principal ally, the Communist Party of India. These calls were echoed in the press and lent credence by the pundits.[8]

The prime minister was particularly worried about the demand for recognition voiced by the veteran Gandhian leader Jayaprakash Narayan. He had long been the conscience of the nation, championing successively the cause of the Tibetans, the Kashmiris, and the Nagas. Narayan sought expert opinion to contest the government's claims about international norms of recognition. Armed with this advice, he assailed the government's stance. In a widely circulated press release, he emphatically claimed that "my sense of history and knowledge of international affairs tell me that it will not be any violation of international law to accord immediate recognition to Bangla Desh."[9]

This many-voiced chorus strengthened the position of the advocates of early recognition within the government. In early May, Foreign Secretary T.N. Kaul wrote to Haksar that "our refusal to recognise Bangla Desh Government cannot be maintained for very long in the face of mounting pressure in our press and at the next sitting of Parliament."[10] Haksar demurred, insisting to the prime minister that "so far there is no evidence that the Provisional Govt has any area in Bangla Desh under its effective control." The Bangladesh leadership was offered an anodyne assurance that the matter was "constantly under consideration."[11] Leaders of the opposition parties were bluntly told that "no Government recognises a revolt unless it acquires legitimacy. That legitimacy is acquired by control of territory and by its writ

running." The provisional government had not yet met these criteria. Besides, most countries maintained that these developments were Pakistan's internal affairs.[12]

Nor was the government prepared at this point to countenance the possibility of war. Indira Gandhi told opposition leaders that an armed intervention by India would "evoke hostile reactions all over the world and all the sympathy and support which the [*sic*] Bangla Desh has been able to evoke in the world will be drowned in Indo-Pak conflict."[13] From the outset, she went with the advice of R.N. Kao, head of the new external intelligence agency, to support a guerrilla movement led by the Awami League. The prime minister and her top advisors were clear that the rebels would have to be given "some orientation training in guerrilla tactics, to prepare for a long struggle."[14]

The advice from the military chiefs slotted smoothly with the prime minister's views. The army chief, General Sam Manekshaw, observed that the existing contingency plans for the east were limited to defending the "chicken's neck corridor" that linked north Bengal with the other north-eastern states of India. A military intervention in East Pakistan would require a reorientation of operational plans, major redeployment of forces into the eastern theatre, and considerable logistical and administrative preparation. Moreover, there was a shortage of stockpiled reserves of armored vehicles and bridging equipment, which would need time to redress. In any case, military operations in East Pakistan were best undertaken after the coming monsoon: better still, after November, when snow-bound Himalayan passes would impede any military moves by China.[15]

In a closed-door meeting with leaders of the opposition on 7 May, Indira Gandhi said that she envisaged a guerrilla campaign "with the object of keeping the West Pakistan army continuously off their balance and to, gradually, bleed them." "If the struggle could be sustained over a period of 6 to 8 months," she added, "it is not unreasonable to expect that the sheer burden of Pakistan carrying on this struggle will become, sooner or later, unbearable." The prime minister was clear, however, that "We cannot, at the present stage, contemplate armed intervention at all. It would not be the right thing to do."[16]

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Meanwhile, the situation was spiraling out of control. In the month of May, the average daily influx of Bengali refugees was a staggering 102,000.[17] Even these numbers understated the magnitude of the problem, for they counted only the registered refugees. Many others blended into the landscape of northeast India. The unprecedented influx of refugees posed a series of grim challenges. For starters, it touched off an outrage among the Indian people and massively enhanced the domestic pressures weighing on the government. Then there was its deleterious impact on the economy. After a torrid time managing economic problems in her first term, Indira Gandhi was looking forward to a period of self-sufficiency in food and to implementing a left-leaning economic program. Soon it became apparent that "there is a limit to our capacity and resources. Even the attempt to provide minimum facilities of shelter, food and medical care is imposing an enormous burden on us."[18] This burden was magnified by the serious health problems that broke out in the refugee camps and that intensified with the onset of the monsoon. In early June 1971, an estimated 9,500 cases of cholera were reported, with 1,250 fatalities. This shot up to 46,000 by the end of September, with nearly 6,000 dead.[19]

Numbers apart, New Delhi was alarmed by the composition of the refugees. Initially, the ratio of Muslims to Hindus among the refugees was 80 to 20. But by May 1971 this had reversed: nearly 80 per cent were Hindus and only about 20 per cent were Muslims.[20] The Indians concluded that "Apparently, Pakistan is trying to solve its internal problems by cutting down the size of its population in East Bengal and changing its communal composition through an organized and selective programme of eviction."[21] The government kept this data under wraps. The prime minister was worried that parties on the Hindu right would make capital out of this and stoke retributory violence against Muslims in India—as had happened during refugee crises in the past. Indira Gandhi also reached out to the leader of Jana Sangh, Atal Behari Vajpayee, and requested him not to politicize the issue, for it would help Pakistan portray the refugee problem as a Hindu–Muslim and India–Pakistan problem.[22] The composition of the refugees was also problematic because of the possibility that the Hindus might seek to stay on in India rather than return to their homes.

The states bordering East Pakistan bore the brunt of the influx. By the end of May, 900,000 refugees had swept into the small state of Tripura, which had a population of only 1.5 million. In West Bengal there were places like Bongaigaon, whose population of 5,000 was dwarfed in comparison with the 300,000 refugees who came in only two months. Parts of Assam, too, faced similar situations.[23] These were among the poorest regions of India, and the arrival of refugees portended social tensions. For one thing, the unregistered refugees were bringing additional pressure to bear on volatile labor markets. For another, there was the danger that the local populace might feel that the refugees were better off than them. New Delhi sought, in fact, only to provide minimum relief to the refugees.[24]

Equally concerning were the security implications of the influx. Northeast India, P.N. Dhar would recall, "was demographically askew, economically retarded, politically unstable and socially volatile."[25] The region teemed with ethnic insurgent groups that operated out of safe havens in East Pakistan. Besides, the recent Naxalite uprising in West Bengal had hurled the state down a spiral of violence. The refugees, New Delhi feared, would come as touch paper to this tinderbox. Moreover, there was concern about the prospect of Maoists on both sides jointly exploiting the ferment generated by the presence of such immense numbers of refugees. "With our own difficulties in West Bengal," wrote Haksar, "the dangers of a link-up between the extremists in the two Bengals are real." The flood of refugees, he concluded, "constitutes a grave security risk which no responsible government can allow to develop."[26]

Writing to practically all heads of states and governments in mid-May 1971, Indira Gandhi emphasized the range of problems thrown up by the refugees. She requested them to convey their concerns about the "personal safety" of Mujib and to "persuade the military rulers of Pakistan to recognize that the solution they have chosen for their problem in East Pakistan is unwise and untenable."[27] Over the next week, the prime minister's stance on the crisis became rather more robust. After a visit to Assam, Tripura, and West Bengal, she told P.N. Dhar, who had recently joined her secretariat: "The world must know what is happening here and do something about it. In any case, we

cannot let Pakistan continue this holocaust." On returning to Delhi, she took a firm decision that India would not absorb these refugees and that Pakistan must allow them to return to their homes in safety. Meanwhile, it was essential to ensure that refugees did not disperse and that they remained in their camps. Accordingly, the scale of the humanitarian effort was stepped up.[28]

Over the next week, Indira Gandhi and her advisors carefully crafted a speech that she delivered in parliament on 24 May 1971. It marked a departure from the stance hitherto adopted by the government. The speech was aimed at multiple audiences with varying objectives: to convince Indian public opinion that the government was determined to tackle the problem; to tell Pakistan that India would not accept the refugees as a fait accompli; and to convince the great powers that Pakistan's actions were pregnant with dangerous possibilities. Pakistan, she declared, "cannot be allowed to seek a solution of its political or other problems at the expense of India and on Indian soil." The prime minister further averred: "Conditions must be created to stop any further influx of refugees and to ensure their early return under credible guarantees for their safety and well-being . . . If the world does not take heed, we shall be constrained to take all measures as may be necessary to ensure our own security." The great powers had "a special responsibility." If they deployed their influence over Pakistan quickly, peace would be preserved in South Asia. "But if they fail," she warned, "then this suppression of human rights . . . will threaten peace."[29]

In the weeks following, New Delhi launched a frenetic diplomatic effort to convince the international community to bring pressure to bear on Pakistan. Ministers and special emissaries were sent to capitals in Europe, North Africa, and East and West Asia. The foreign minister made a whistle-stop tour to Moscow, Bonn, Paris, Ottawa, Washington, and London. The government also roped in Jayaprakash Narayan to visit major capitals and present the moral case of the Bengalis. Indian diplomats were instructed not to be content with receiving assurances of "a few tons of medicine or some money" but to make strenuous efforts in presenting India's case. "Plug this once, twice, thrice, four times. Start from the lower rung and go up to the highest levels. Come to the lower level and try and all levels."[30]

The power that wielded greatest influence on Pakistan had no interest in exercising it to resolve the crisis. US President Richard Nixon and his national security advisor, Henry Kissinger, were embarked on a secret opening to Communist China. Yahya Khan was their principal conduit in this undertaking. Nixon and Kissinger were loath to consider any step that might derail their cherished plan. The officials in the State Department as well as diplomats in the region underscored the magnitude of the humanitarian crisis.[31] To no avail. In July 1971, Kissinger took a secret flight from Pakistan and landed in Beijing. The opening to China was now in the open. New Delhi followed all this with deep suspicion. Indira Gandhi and Haksar had always harbored misgivings about the United States. Nixon's geopolitical priorities, at this desperate hour, grated on them.

More immediately, they had to deal with a potential entente between Pakistan, China, and the United States—one that considerably complicated India's strategy in the unfolding crisis. The Indian government dusted off a proposal from the Soviet Union—first mooted in 1969—for a treaty of peace and friendship. This had helped Indira buckle the support of the CPI later that year when she had to lead a minority government. As general elections loomed, she had gone cold on the idea. Now, the treaty was revived as an instrument of strategic insurance and deterrence.

On 9 August 1971, the foreign ministers of India and the Soviet Union signed a treaty of "Peace, Friendship and Cooperation." The treaty was aimed at "expanding and consolidating the existing relationship of sincere friendship" between the two countries. It was valid for twenty years. Article IX of the treaty stated that "In the event of either Party being subjected to an attack or a threat thereof, the High Contracting Parties shall immediately enter into mutual consultations in order to remove the threat and to take appropriate effective measures to ensure peace and the security of their countries."

This did not mean, however, that Moscow was willing to give India a blank check. In fact, the Soviets' assessment of the crisis differed significantly from India's. All along, the Soviet Union emphasized the need for peace and stability in Pakistan and in the subcontinent. They were averse to the fracturing of Pakistan on strategic and ideological

grounds. Moscow believed that a breakaway East Pakistan would be vulnerable to the influence and domination of China. They also thought that if the crisis turned into an India–Pakistan conflict, the resulting instability would redound to the advantage of China.

Meeting Indira Gandhi the day after the treaty was signed, the Soviet foreign minister, Andrei Gromyko, reiterated his government's view on dealing with the crisis. Moscow's assessment was that "the Pak [*sic*] military will not succeed in keeping down the people of East Pakistan for long and the rule is doomed." But, he added, "it is not for us to prejudge whether East Pakistan should be separate from West Pakistan or one with it." "You may rest assured," said Gromyko, choosing his words carefully, "that in regard to the refugees we shall always support your position." Indira Gandhi raised the possibility of Mujib's execution and pointedly said that "we will not remain indifferent and will take certain steps." Gromyko responded: "We believe it would be very good if your Government continues the restraint and regards the situation in a cold blooded way . . . The heart should be warm but the mind should be cool as we say."[32] The gulf between the two sides had not been spanned by the treaty of friendship.

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The main concern for Indian decision-makers remained the continuing influx of refugees. Up to the end of July 1971, 7.23 million had taken shelter in India. By 15 December an additional 2.67 million had poured in, taking the total to almost 10 million. From New Delhi's standpoint, the problem of repatriating the refugees was enormous. So long as Bengalis continued to flee East Pakistan, they could not be persuaded to return. In this context, the religious composition of the refugees took an alarming color. As of 31 October 1971, the Indian government recorded that 82.3 per cent of the refugees were Hindus. New Delhi was worried not just about the difficulty of convincing the Hindus to return to East Pakistan, but also about the prospect of their melting into the population of eastern India and providing fertile ground for Maoists in the region.[33]

Then there was the burgeoning economic burden of maintaining the refugees. The budget presented in May catered for Rs. 600 million

for the relief of refugees. But this sum was submerged by the scale of the deluge. In August, the government was forced to present a supplementary demand of Rs. 2,000 million. By the third week of September, it was assessed that maintaining 8 million refugees in camps for six months at the rate of just Rs. 3 per person per day would amount to Rs. 4,320 million or about $576 million. At that point, the relief aid pledged by foreign countries and agencies amounted to $153.67 million, of which only $20.47 million had actually been received. By October 1971, the projected cost of maintaining 9 million refugees was assessed at Rs. 5,250 million, while the external aid amounted only to Rs. 1,125 million. The escalating costs of sheltering the Bengalis made a mockery of the government's original estimate for fiscal deficit. In consequence, programs for economic development and social welfare had to be trimmed and additional resources mobilized by fresh taxation and commercial borrowing.[34]

The government realized that a prolonged crisis would push the problem to unmanageable proportions. While war would entail significant costs, these would be more bearable than the burden posed by the refugees. An assessment prepared by P.N. Dhar, economist and secretary to the prime minister, at the end of July 1971 underscored the potential consequences of choosing war. The most significant of these would be the position of foreign exchange reserves, which had already depleted in the previous fiscal year. Since the level of the reserves was dependent on foreign trade, India's trade partners would create difficulties in accepting its exports, so depriving it of foreign exchange earnings. But this would "amount to a complete economic blockade . . . an extreme [*sic*] imaginable situation, which I do not believe can be taken seriously." The second component of the reserves came from foreign aid. Donor countries could coerce India by freezing aid. In this situation, India could reasonably threaten to impose a moratorium on debt: "the size of our debts makes our creditors vulnerable to our reactions. Keynes once said that if I owe you 100 pounds, I should worry but if I owe you a million pounds, you should worry. We owe many millions to our creditors!"[35]

Economic considerations, however pressing, did not determine the decision to escalate the crisis. The initial move was taken in late August

1971, in response to a series of developments. By this time, New Delhi had taken stock of its diplomatic efforts to convince the international community to pressurize Pakistan. It was evident that most countries had refused to go along with India's view that the crisis needed political resolution in Pakistan and had preferred to treat the refugee problem in India and the situation in East Pakistan as separate issues. The few countries that did appreciate India's position had felt that it would be unwise to publicly pressurize the Pakistani junta. The rare country that did impress upon Yahya the need to negotiate with the elected leadership of the Awami League did not seem to have any leverage in Pakistan. And the country that possessed the most leverage—the United States—was also the most energetic supporter of Yahya Khan's military regime.

In mid-October 1971, a special unit in the foreign ministry dealing with the crisis—under D.P. Dhar, close advisor to Indira Gandhi and until recently envoy to Moscow—prepared a detailed appraisal of the situation. The assessment concluded that the Indian forces would have to throw their weight fully behind the Bengali fighters, known as the Mukti Bahini, if the latter were to prevail against the Pakistan army. It also noted that the international community remained ambivalent about the emergence of an independent Bangladesh. If India moved towards a military conflict, the United States, China, and some Western democracies would oppose India and support Pakistan. This support, however, was likely to fall short of overt military involvement. Lastly, it underscored the mounting domestic pressures on the government to take decisive action. The assessment was forwarded to the political affairs committee of the cabinet. Indira Gandhi and her colleagues decided that operational support for the Mukti Bahini would have to be qualitatively stepped up, and that preparations must be made for the possibility of an open conflict with Pakistan.[36]

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Before the final act, however, India sought to ensure that the international context would not impede the move towards imposing a solution of its own choosing. The country that mattered most for India's strategy was, of course, the Soviet Union. Despite the Indo-Soviet treaty, Moscow had been unwilling to fully support India's stance on the crisis.

The Russians continued to believe that the refugee and political aspects of the crisis should be segregated. And they were eager to prevent another war on the subcontinent. In late September 1971, Indira Gandhi traveled to Moscow to persuade the Soviet leadership to change its stance.

In two long meetings with the troika of Soviet leaders—General Secretary Brezhnev, Premier Kosygin, and Chairman Podgorny—she said that India, despite her best efforts, was being pulled into the whirlpool of conflict. She informed them that the Bangladesh leaders were unwilling to settle for anything short of independence. When Brezhnev suggested, "thinking aloud," that she meet with Yahya Khan, the prime minister retorted: "I doubt if I could return to my country if I did this." At length, Brezhnev assured her of "complete political support," while warning her against according recognition to the Bangladesh government-in-exile. Clearly, the prime minister had not succeeded in pulling the Soviets to her side.[37]

Indira Gandhi's subsequent tour across key Western capitals elicited only a modicum of sympathy and support. Her meeting with Nixon in Washington was, put mildly, frosty. The president held forth on the steps taken by Yahya, including his willingness "to hold direct discussions with cleared Awami League leaders." He insisted that "the U.S. could not urge policies which would be tantamount to overthrowing President Yahya." The consequences of military action, Nixon warned, "were incalculably dangerous." Indira Gandhi reprised the Indian position at some length: "it was no longer realistic to expect East and West Pakistan to remain together."[38]

Nixon and Kissinger met next morning to take stock. When Nixon remarked that Indira Gandhi was being "a bitch," Kissinger observed that "the Indians are bastards anyway. They are starting a war there." Echoing the president's tirade, he said, "While she was a bitch, we got what we wanted too . . . she will not be able to go home and say that the United States didn't give her a warm reception and therefore, in despair, she's got to go to war." Nixon concurred: "We really slobbered over the old witch." Their sexist bile and prejudice also led them to overestimate their impact on the prime minister. Nixon boasted to his aide Bob Haldeman: "You should have heard, Bob, the way we worked

her around." It was decided that, in the next meeting, the president would play it "cool."[39]

In the meeting that afternoon, it was Indira Gandhi who assumed her iciest air of aloofness. She did not bring up the South Asian crisis at all. Instead, she probed Nixon about US foreign policy across the globe.[40] Her attitude, Kissinger would later write, "brought out all of Nixon's latent insecurities."[41] This was a perceptive observation. A month after this meeting—after the war began—Nixon would tell Kissinger: "what I'm concerned about, I really worry about, is whether or not I was too easy on the goddamn woman when she was here . . . She was playing us. And you know the cold way she was the next day . . . this woman suckered us."[42]

After returning to New Delhi, Indira Gandhi ordered a further escalation of military action along the borders with East Pakistan. On 28 November, the crisis management committee reported to her that the moment "for decisive action has come." All necessary preparations had been done. The defense ministry confirmed that the military was "in a position to secure the defeat and surrender of the occupying forces in East Bengal in the shortest possible time." The prime minister gave the go-ahead for a full-scale attack on East Pakistan. The D-Day was set for 4 December 1971, when India would also recognize the government of Bangladesh.[43]

As it happened, Pakistan launched a preemptive air strike in the western theatre on 3 December, so allowing India openly to declare war. The military campaign on the eastern front progressed faster than anticipated, bypassing the towns and strongpoints held by the Pakistani forces. Nixon responded first by cutting all economic aid to India and then by dispatching the US navy's seventh fleet—armed with nuclear weapons—to coerce the Indians from pressing their victory. In the event, it ended up accelerating the Indian military's thrust towards Dhaka. On the evening of 16 December 1971, the Pakistan army in the east surrendered to Indian forces. India would eventually count 93,000 prisoners of war.

Indira Gandhi was with a Swedish television crew when General Manekshaw called to inform her of the surrender in Dhaka. The prime minister immediately made for parliament. A cathedral hush hung over

the house as she began reading her statement: "The West Pakistan forces have unconditionally surrendered in Bangladesh . . . Dacca [Dhaka] is now the free capital of a free country." The parliament erupted in acclamation and every line of hers was cheered to the echo. In the days ahead, Indira Gandhi would be praised in parliament with awe bordering on veneration. She was compared to Durga, the martial goddess of the Hindu pantheon, and to Shakti, the spiritual embodiment of power. The *Economist*, capturing the mood of the times, crowned her the "Empress of India."[44] Indira Gandhi's Caesarism was now aglow with the charisma endowed by an unexampled military victory for India.

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Political dividends followed soon. In March 1972, elections were held in eighteen states across the country. The Congress manifesto was a paean to the political and strategic sagacity of Indira Gandhi:

> the broad strategy adopted inspired by wisdom and deep understanding of the great issues involved achieved success. The combination of patience and decisiveness and the timing of every key move have been widely acclaimed. No step was taken a day too soon or too late. The highest degree of statesmanship was required to withstand and frustrate international and domestic pressures.[45]

Indeed, these elections were very like a popular acclamation of Indira Gandhi's leadership. The Congress party swept all the states. As P.N. Dhar conceded, this stunning outcome was "a gift of the victory in the Bangladesh war; they were truly khaki elections."[46] The political landscape was scythed clean of rivals and opponents. The opposition parties were at once undone and unnerved.

The postwar conference in Shimla showed her capable of managing the peace as well as winning the war. Indira Gandhi was persuaded by Haksar not to impose a punitive peace on Pakistan. Had the Treaty of Versailles, he observed, "not imposed upon Germany humiliating terms of peace, not only the rise of Nazism would have been avoided but also the seeds of the Second World War would not have been sown." In

consequence, the prime minister refrained from pushing President Z.A. Bhutto for a final settlement on Jammu and Kashmir. Instead, she sought the conversion of the extant ceasefire line (from 1949) into a "line of control," as well as a commitment to settle disputes bilaterally and to avoid using force. The prime minister was averse to making the ceasefire line the permanent international border because she did not want to be seen as giving up territory that India formally claimed. She was content for the line of control gradually to acquire "the characteristics" of a peaceful international border.[47]

The victory against Pakistan and the Shimla agreement also strengthened Indira Gandhi's hand in dealing with the knottiest problem in Indian politics: Jammu and Kashmir. India's only Muslim-majority state had acceded to the union under dramatic circumstances months after partition in 1947. Nehru had regarded this as an affirmation of India's secular identity and had sought to forge a close relationship with the stalwart leader of the Kashmiri Muslims, Sheikh Abdullah. The Kashmiris had been promised a plebiscite on accession to India. Yet both Nehru and Abdullah had resiled from this commitment without openly repudiating it. The state had also been promised substantial autonomy under Article 370 of the Indian constitution. All this had unravelled by 1953. Nehru had dismissed and incarcerated Abdullah, who had remained in and out of prisons for the next decade and a half. Kashmir's autonomy had been systematically eroded by pliant political leaders willing to bend the knee.

Indira Gandhi had disapproved of Nehru's harsh treatment of Abdullah. As prime minister she had sought to chart a different course. In the wake of the 1967 elections in Kashmir, hardly free or fair, she had decided to reach out to the Sheikh. Haksar had outlined the framework that would guide the government's efforts to seek a rapprochement. First, New Delhi would "resist every attempt" by Abdullah and his followers to impart to the issue an international dimension. Second, Abdullah had to understand that "we are determined to keep as part of India the territory of J & K, irrespective of the wishes of the people." Third, once the Sheikh accepted this premise, "we would be prepared to consider refashioning the autonomy of J & K, provided of course our overall interests and security of India are kept in mind."[48] In short,

Abdullah would be brought back into the picture but entirely on New Delhi's terms.

Initially, the prime minister had tasked the diplomat T.N. Kaul, a Kashmiri who had known Abdullah from the 1930s, to initiate the discussions. The Sheikh had sought firm guarantees that the "Government would not whittle down Article 370 as it had done." He had "confidence in the bona fides of the Prime Minister" but was unsure if the political parties would support a quest for a reasonable solution.[49] As negotiations had continued, Abdullah had been released from house arrest in March 1968. However, Indira Gandhi had been embroiled in the struggle for power within her own party and had had time only to mollify the bickering leaders of the Congress in Kashmir. The question of dealing with Sheikh Abdullah came to the fore only in 1972.

The Bangladesh war dramatically altered the context of the Kashmir dispute. New Delhi now held most cards. India had demonstrated its preponderant power in South Asia. Pakistan had literally been cut to size and was in no position to support the demand for an independent Kashmir. Abdullah and his principal lieutenant, Mirza Afzal Beg, leader of the Plebiscite Front, read the tea leaves and sought to change tack. In early February 1972, Mirza Afzal Beg issued a press statement that the Plebiscite Front had never questioned the accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India and had always stood for Article 370 as the constitutional link that bound the state to the union. The next month, Abdullah himself told *The Times* (London): "There is no quarrel with the Government of India over accession; it was over the structure of internal autonomy."[50] Radhakrishna Patil, an associate of Jayaprakash Narayan, met Beg and "found him a completely changed man, anxious to come to a settlement of the Kashmiri question . . . he repeated time and again they were prepared to advise the people of Kashmir to finalise the accession, if the status quo ante, as prescribed at the time of the accession was restored."[51] Abdullah and Beg had evidently assessed their position anew, though they considerably overestimated their hand in any future negotiations.

In the run-up to the Shimla conference, Haksar, too, began to pick up the pieces on Kashmir. On his instruction, the Intelligence Bureau had conducted a survey in rural Kashmir, especially Baramulla and

Anantnag, of popular opinion about Sheikh Abdullah. The Intelligence Bureau reported that "Sheikh Sahib was held in high esteem and affection by the peasantry. He symbolises Kashmir to them. There was no visible erosion of this feeling." Haksar agreed with this assessment. He also felt that it would be unwise for the prime minister to meet President Bhutto with Abdullah languishing in her prisons: "our moral and political position would be very weak." Haksar told her that "it was imperative to make a fresh start and lead him by hand on the difficult and tortuous road whose ultimate destination would be reconciliation."[52]

On 10 June 1972, Indira Gandhi met Sheikh Abdullah. Two days later, Haksar advised the prime minister to commence a dialogue—"rather than a 'negotiation' "—which would be conducted away from the glare of publicity. This would aim at ascertaining "the terms and conditions on which Sheikh Abdullah could participate in the political life not merely of Kashmir but of India as a whole." Haksar was clear that the "dialogue should be a prolonged one": it should consider the question of "autonomy" in concrete detail. At his suggestion, Indira Gandhi tasked the diplomat and administrator G. Parthasarathi to represent her in these discussions.[53] Meanwhile, Abdullah publicly stated that he would strive for "an honourable way of removing our misunderstandings" and that Pakistan had no *locus standi* on this issue.[54]

As designed, the talks proceeded at a stately pace. On substantive issues, Abdullah attempted to hold his own. In August 1974, he bluntly wrote to Parthasarathi that "I have made it abundantly clear to you that I can assume office only on the basis of the position as it existed on 8th August, 1953."[55] In other words, Abdullah wanted the repeal of all constitutional changes made in the state under Article 370 since his dismissal, as well as restoration of the old model of an elected governor in Kashmir. Subsequent negotiations between Beg and Parthasarathi resulted in a set of "agreed conclusions" in November 1974. These were far from the restoration that Abdullah sought.

The Sheikh wrote to Indira Gandhi expressing hope for a satisfactory and amicable settlement of the issues where the two sides had disagreed. But the prime minister was unwilling to concede anything: "I doubt whether anything will be gained by our discussing these matters again."[56] Abdullah wrote a lengthy missive recounting the history of the dispute

and the injustices meted out to him: "I can only start from the point where I left off in August, 1953." He added that "for me to take even this position is not going to be without difficulties, and I shall be faced with many a doubting mind. But I would nevertheless give it a try." But if the prime minister was unwilling to discuss disagreements, he was willing to walk away from the negotiations.[57]

Indira Gandhi and Abdullah met in Kashmir on 11 February 1975. It was evident to the Sheikh that there was nothing more on offer. So, Abdullah elected to clinch the accord on the basis of the "agreed conclusions" and return to power after twenty-two years in the political wilderness. The accord was signed in New Delhi by Beg and Parthasarathi on 24 February. It placed Abdullah's stamp of approval on the evisceration of Kashmir's autonomy.

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Cumulatively, the massive electoral mandate of 1971, the victorious war in Bangladesh, and the sweeping win in the state elections of 1972 heralded a sharp and sudden tilt in the balance of institutional power towards the executive. This set the context for Indira Gandhi's showdown with the judiciary. The supreme court's striking down of ordinances on bank nationalization and privy purses had partly impelled her call for early general elections. Returned to power with a decisive majority, Indira Gandhi took up the proposals for amending the constitution in the first meeting of her new cabinet. Spearheading these efforts was her new law minister, H.R. Gokhale: a former judge in the Bombay high court who had joined her party in 1969. The ideological ballast for the endeavor was provided by Mohan Kumaramangalam, an old friend who had quit the Communist Party of India and his legal practice to join her. Then there was Siddhartha Shankar Ray, education minister, who brought to the table a modicum of legal knowledge and a political sensibility unsalted by constitutional propriety.

Indira Gandhi's standoff with the supreme court stretched all the way back to her early months in office. Yet the underlying issues could be traced to tensions within the Indian constitution. Part III of the constitution guaranteed a set of "Fundamental Rights" to all citizens: the right to equality; the right to freedom, including the right to

property; the right against exploitation; the right to freedom of religion; cultural and educational rights; and the right to constitutional remedies. The constitution also enabled judicial review of legislative and administrative actions. Part IV of the constitution dealt with "Directive Principles of State Policy." These fifteen provisions pertained to social and economic goals that the state ought to pursue in making laws. These included broad goals like distributing ownership and control of material resources of the community to secure the common good, as well as specific ones like reducing income inequality and the right to livelihood. Crucially, unlike the fundamental rights, the principles were not enforceable by any court.

The tension between fundamental rights, especially the right to property, and the directive principles had initially come to the fore on the question of land reforms after independence. But it acquired a political charge in the long 1970s owing to its bearing on Indira Gandhi's desire to signal her progressive political credentials and her determination to pursue a slew of anti-poverty programs.

In the 1967 Golak Nath case, the supreme court had held that parliament could not use its power to amend the constitution to abridge the fundamental rights. Such an amendment was deemed to be a "law" under Article 13: an article that proscribed parliament from making any laws curtailing the fundamental rights. The majority opinion of the court, delivered by Chief Justice K. Subba Rao, also invoked the concept of "implied limitations" on the parliament's power, especially to pass amendments that would cripple a constitution. In fact, the majority judgment had gone beyond the text of the constitution and against the precedents. A dissenting minority of three judges had observed that an amendment was not a "law" under Article 13 and that all parts of the constitution could be amended. They had also rejected the notion that some parts of the constitution were too foundational to be amended, arguing that this would endow the judiciary with the sole authority to determine the basic features of the constitution. This would, they had warned, lead to a "harvest of legal wrangles."[58]

The court's decision had placed it at loggerheads with the prime minister. Indira Gandhi's tilt to the left in economic policy could hardly be accomplished if the courts so restrained the parliament's powers.

What is more, Chief Justice Subba Rao had resigned from his office soon after delivering the judgment to run for president of India with the support of the opposition parties, especially the Swatantra Party. The chief justice's utter lack of propriety allowed his critics to paint the judiciary as in hock to the propertied classes. It also made the government more single-minded in its quest to overturn Golak Nath—not least because the bank nationalization and privy purses judgments had also turned on the question of parliament's power to make laws on matters pertaining to fundamental rights, including the right to property.

Back in office in 1971, Indira Gandhi felt that a frontal assault on property as a fundamental right was bound to trigger stiff resistance. Instead, she threw her weight behind a constitutional amendment that would strengthen parliament's supremacy, coupled with another modifying the property article. A third amendment would end the privy purses and other princely privileges.

The Twenty-fourth Amendment bill stated that the supreme court's decision on Golak Nath meant that "Parliament is considered to have no power to take away or curtail any of the fundamental rights guaranteed by Part III of the Constitution even if it becomes necessary to do so for giving effect to the Directive Principles of State Policy." It was therefore "necessary to provide expressly that Parliament has power to amend any provision of the Constitution." The bill further placed such amendments beyond the purview of Article 13, which stated that parliament could make no law abridging the fundamental rights.[59] Tabling it in parliament, the law minister loftily observed that the "people are sovereign and Parliament, which is fully representative of the people, is supreme." The bill, he maintained, was designed "to remove impediments to the fulfilment of our socio-economic programmes" and would not menace the fundamental rights to life and liberty. Indira Gandhi said that her government did not seek to extinguish right to property, but "where property rights are in conflict with public purpose, public purpose must hold sway."[60]

The government had the numbers, but the opposition had its arguments. The Socialists and the Communists supported the move to strengthen parliament's powers but insisted that other fundamental rights and freedoms—speech, assembly, association, and so forth—be

explicitly exempted from the parliament's amending powers. Swatantra and Jana Sangh MPs were vociferous in their criticism of the bill, arguing that an unbridled parliament could undermine the foundations of the constitution. In vain. The bill was passed by both houses in short order and subsequently ratified by the state legislatures.

The next, Twenty-fifth, amendment bill was in part aimed at Article 31: the property article of the fundamental rights. The article stated that the courts could not question any law providing for the compulsory acquisition of property, on the grounds that it did not pay adequate compensation. In the bank nationalization case, the supreme court had held that the constitution guaranteed the right to compensation. Furthermore, the "Court can go into the question whether the amount paid to the owner of the property is what may be regarded reasonably as compensation for loss of property." To obviate this reading, the bill sought to replace the word "compensation" in Article 31 with "amount" and debarred the courts from questioning the adequacy or mode of payment of the amount. The amendment bill also sought to place the fundamental rights within a hierarchy. A new Article 31(c) was sought to be introduced, providing that if a law was passed avowedly to give effect to the directive principles of state policy, then it could not be struck down on the grounds that it violated fundamental rights of equality before law (Article 14), freedoms of speech and so on (Article 19), or right to property (Article 31).[61]

The proposed Article 31(c) drew sharp criticism from the press as well as the legal community. The Law Commission, an advisory body to the law ministry, was also set against it. The chairman of the Law Commission, former supreme court chief justice P.B. Gajendragadkar, met the prime minister as well as the troika of Gokhale, Kumaramangalam, and Ray to convey his "serious misgivings."[62] Sensing an imperviousness to his advice, the commission took the unprecedented step of publishing a report ahead of the parliamentary debate, warning against the proposed article.

The Law Commission's recommendations provided ammunition to the opposition. Gokhale insisted in parliament that Article 31(c) was imperative to ensure that the courts could not decide whether a law implemented the directive principles. This was the domain of policy

and politics. "The worst danger," he maintained, "is that we enable them [judges] to infuse their own political philosophy in their judgements, which unfortunately has been the experience . . . for the past ten years." The "fundamental basis" of governance, he added, "should be the Directive Principles and not the Fundamental Rights." Kumaramangalam chimed in with "We should not permit the courts . . . to sit in judgement on issues which are really political." The prime minister claimed that it was "ridiculous to talk about arbitrary use of powers," for she had the people's mandate. The government had no desire to weaken the judiciary, but there was "no decision in the world which is not political."[63] Prominent legal minds in the opposition decried the bill as doing away with the safeguard of judicial review. Yet the bill was swiftly adopted, as was the Twenty-sixth Amendment abrogating the privy purses and privileges.

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As the government pushed through these controversial amendments, it ran into the judiciary on another front. In March 1970 Swami Kesavananda Bharati, the pontiff of a Hindu monastery in Kerala, had challenged the state government's efforts to regulate via land reform acts the management of monastic property. Advised by the eminent lawyer Nani Palkhivala, the monk had filed a petition in the supreme court. While the writ was pending, parliament had passed the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth Amendments, as well as the Twenty-ninth Amendment placing Kerala's land reform acts in the Ninth Schedule of the constitution, beyond the reach of the courts. The petitioner now sought to challenge all three amendments. A thirteen-judge bench of the supreme court began hearing the case in late October 1972.

From the outset, it was clear that this case would mark an inflection point in the ongoing tussle between the executive and the judiciary. The sheer size of the bench—larger than the eleven-judge bench that had delivered the Golak Nath verdict—underscored the stakes for both sides. The petitioner's counsel, Palkhivala, made it clear up front that the central issue was parliament's power to amend the constitution. The constitution, he argued, was of course open to amendment. But an institution established by the constitution could neither inflate its own

constituent power nor claim the power to change or destroy the fundamental features of the constitution. In particular, parliament was not empowered to abridge or abrogate fundamental rights and freedoms given to the people by themselves by means of the constitution. If parliament arrogated to itself the power to amend the constitution as it saw fit, liberty would be in peril. Property, he contended, was an essential feature of the constitution because it was a prerequisite for the exercise of other fundamental rights. Training his sights on Article 31(c), inserted via the Twenty-fifth Amendment, Palkhivala argued that it empowered the legislature to override the constitution, so undermining the latter's supremacy—a fundamental feature of any constitution. Moreover, by subordinating fundamental rights to the directive principles, the article effectively destroyed the rights.[64]

The government's senior counsel, H.M. Seervai, rejected these claims. The assumption that parliament would abuse its legislative power was misconceived. In any case, the power to amend any part of the constitution was implicit in Article 368. While the constitution did contain such fundamental features as parliamentary democracy, rule of law, judicial review, and so forth, the constitution-makers had not intended them to be unalterably permanent. As for Article 31(c), it did not confer power to amend the constitution but merely removed the fetters on the legislature placed by Articles 14, 19, and 31. Attorney General Niren De argued that there could be no inherent limitations on parliament's power to amend a written constitution. This power of amendment included repeal and addition, variation, and substitution. Finally, he held that the fundamental rights were indeed subordinate to the directive principles, so long as the latter advanced the welfare of the people.

On 24 April 1973, the bench handed down its judgment. The procedural aspects of this judgment were at least as remarkable as its substantive content. The thirteen judges delivered no fewer than eleven opinions and a joint "statement" by nine of them purporting to summarize the majority opinion.[65] The statement overruled Golak Nath and upheld the Twenty-fourth Amendment. It also struck down Article 31(c) of the Twenty-fifth Amendment while upholding the rest of it. The crux of the joint statement of the nine judges was that "Article 368 did not

enable Parliament to alter the basic structure or framework of the Constitution." There were significant discrepancies between the statement and what some of these nine judges had stated in their individual opinions. The legal commentary on the judgments was equally confused.[66] Nevertheless, the judgment as a whole was seen as a major setback for the government in its fundamental quest for untrammeled powers to amend the constitution. Indira Gandhi said nothing in public after the judgment was delivered. But she struck back at the judiciary with exceptional ferocity.

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The government had followed the proceedings closely. The prime minister's main advisors on these matters—Gokhale, Kumaramangalam, and Ray—had apparently sought to suborn some of the judges, though others denied that such pressures had been exerted.[67] In any event, the government knew that the decision would be split and had obtained the texts of the unfavorable judgments ahead of the formal pronouncement. Against the backdrop of the imminent verdict, the political affairs committee of the cabinet met on the morning of 24 April 1973 and took a momentous decision on the appointment of the next chief justice of India.[68] Setting aside the customary practice of appointing the next-senior-most judge of the supreme court, they decide to supersede J.M. Shelat and the next two judges in the line of seniority, K.S. Hedge and A.N. Grover. Instead, they decided to appoint A.N. Ray as chief justice.

Ray's unprecedented elevation to the post reflected his consistently pro-government position in key cases: he was the sole dissenter in the bank nationalization case, one of two dissenters in the privy purses case, and one of four judges who did not sign the "statement" in the Kesavananda Bharati case. Besides, he strongly upheld the parliament's power to amend any part of the constitution. Ray was seen as a reliable judge at a time when the supreme court seemed determined to thwart the government at every important turn.

Defending the supersession of the judges in parliament, Kumaramangalam brazenly argued: "we are entitled surely to look into the philosophy of a judge. We are entitled to look into his outlook. We

are entitled to come to the conclusion that the philosophy of this Judge is forward-looking and of that Judge backward-looking and to decide that we will take the forward-looking Judge and not that backward-looking judge."[69] He commended President Franklin Roosevelt's attempts to pack the US supreme court during the New Deal as a worthy precedent. He elaborated the argument in an ersatz pamphlet, but without revealing the crucial point that the US senate had thwarted the president's attempt to undermine the highest court.[70]

The supersession of judges drew the ire of the opposition and the legal fraternity. Palkhivala published a denunciatory book with contributions from Setalvad and three former chief justices, among others.[71] The highly respected erstwhile attorney general M.C. Setalvad described the government's justifications as "completely dishonest." Former chief justice J.C. Shah called the supersession "a remarkable piece of political skulduggery." Chief Justice Subba Rao, who had presided over Golak Nath before resigning his office and running for the presidency, wrote an opinion piece declaring the appointment unconstitutional. He ingeniously read the relevant provisions of the constitution as requiring the president to mandatorily consult the outgoing chief justice as well as other judges of the court—none of which had been done.[72] The supreme court Bar Association adopted a resolution strongly condemning the move as "a blatant and outrageous attempt at undermining the independence and impartiality of the judiciary."[73]

The government sought to give as good as it got. Kumaramangalam noted that it was "not accidental" that Palkhivala was the leading voice of criticism: "he was the lawyer of the bank magnates in the Bank Nationalisation case, of the princes in Privy Purse case as well as of the landlords in the latest Constitution amendment case."[74] A.R. Antulay, a lawyer and congressman from Bombay—and future chief minister of Maharashtra—wrote a detailed rebuttal of the criticisms, making short work of the shoddier arguments advanced by the likes of Subba Rao.[75] The prime minister stayed mostly above the fray.

It was a telling commentary on Indira Gandhi's government that such a consequential move had raised not an eyebrow in the political affairs committee of the cabinet. Worse, the rest of the cabinet had been entirely in the dark. As a minister bitterly conceded, "We may be

consulted about the removal of three clerks from the Government but never on subjects like the appointment of the Chief Justice."[76]

Indeed, by this time Indira Gandhi had cemented and centralized her hold on both the government and the party to an unprecedented extent. It is a commonplace to argue that Indira Gandhi's original sin was splitting the old Congress: an act that set in chain a process of rapid institutional decay in the party. Such arguments implicitly assume that the undivided Congress party—comprising strong provincial as well as central leadership and relying on the former both to deliver "vote banks" and to transmit information from local to national levels—could have continued on its course. In fact, the elections of 1967 starkly underlined the crisis of the old order. Yet the price of surmounting this crisis of representation via a Caesarist style was the thinning out of serious political talent and the emergence of a sycophantic symphony that accompanied the prime minister's increasingly imperious rule. Indira Gandhi had indeed scaled the pinnacle of political power, yet she knew all along that the intractable challenges and immovable objects lay in the economic realm.

4

QUEST FOR RENEWAL

The Congress party's manifesto for the state elections in March 1972 riffed on the themes of war and independence. While it gave full play to India's decisive victory against Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh, the manifesto and the campaign also declared a "war against poverty" and a drive towards "*Purna Arthik Swaraj*," or "complete economic independence." Neither of these was a particularly original slogan. The call for economic independence mimicked the Indian National Congress's resolution at the historic Lahore session in December 1929 demanding "*purna swaraj*" (complete independence). "War on poverty" was proclaimed in 1964 by US President Lyndon Johnson. Prior to purloining this, the Congress party had coined the catchy "*Garibi Hatao*" ("Remove Poverty") for the 1971 general elections. These slogans are usually regarded as emblematic of Indira Gandhi's vacuous populism: a nebulous radicalism concocted to entice the masses. To be sure, this was electoral rhetoric; but it was not empty rhetoric. For Indira Gandhi's focus on poverty alleviation reflected a deep change in the Indian state's approach to conceiving and tackling this ineluctable problem. Indeed, this transformation was among the most enduring changes in India's long 1970s.

Poverty, and the related problem of unemployment, had always bulked large in the Indian state's imagination. The early five-year plans sought to address it by rendering agriculture more productive and by fostering the growth of industries. Such broad-based growth was

expected to generate more employment and higher incomes across the economy. These were widely peddled nostrums of the time—not just by Indian policymakers, but by the mushrooming global network of economists and experts, international institutions and private foundations focused on the problems of the developing world. In the Indian context, however, a new conception of poverty gradually uncoiled within the state apparatus from the early 1960s and set the terms for expert knowledge.

This shift is best understood as turning on a distinction between seeing poverty as a relative condition and seeing it as an absolute condition. At the risk of oversimplification,[1] we could say that the relative conception regards poverty as a consequence of an unequal distribution of income—irrespective of the income level of the people at the bottom of the scale. One could be more or less poor. The policy correlating to this was the focus on promoting economic growth to raise the incomes and reduce the state of deprivation of the poor. The second conception, by contrast, considers poverty as a condition of absolute impoverishment. It sharply distinguishes "the poor" from the rest of the population. The adoption of this alternative conception led to the emergence of an object of knowledge called the "poverty line"—and, in time, to novel techniques of policy and institutional practices, such as targeted poverty alleviation programs. Cumulatively, this created a new ensemble of governmental rationality—one that superseded the postcolonial developmental state and was deployed to construct anew the material bases of consent.

Ironically, the origins of this far-reaching shift can be traced to the nerve center of the developmental state: the Planning Commission. In mid-1962, the Planning Commission set up a working group to consider the "minimum standard of living" for every Indian. The group included such stellar economists as D.R. Gadgil, B.N. Ganguli, V.K.R.V. Rao, and P.S. Lokanathan, as well as prominent politicians Minoo Masani of the Swatantra Party and Asoka Mehta of the Socialist Party. The exercise was shepherded by Pitambar Pant, who led the perspective planning division of the commission. The working group's recommendations flowed into a document produced under Pant's watchful eye. Blandly titled "Perspective of Development: 1961–1976," this paper set in train

a gradual but far-reaching shift in the discourse—away from the vision of development hitherto espoused by the Planning Commission.

The paper reflected the pensive mood within the Nehru government on planned economic development. The first decade, it began, had "unquestionably been a period of noteworthy progress." National income had risen just shy of 40 per cent and agricultural output by a bit more, while industrial production had more than doubled. Yet the census of 1961 had registered population growth at nearly twice the expected rate. Hence, a major part of the additional output was "neutralised by the rapidly growing population." In consequence, per capita income had inched up by just 16 per cent. Living standards had but marginally improved. Per capita annual income in 1960–61 was around Rs. 330. The average per capita expenditure on consumption was about Rs. 300 per year, or Rs. 25 per person per month. This was "too meagre to sustain a living which could be considered tolerable in the modern context." In fact, the picture was "far more distressing" because the plight of a large proportion of the people was "much worse" than suggested by the average. Data on the distribution of income and consumption showed that more than 60 per cent had a level of consumption lower than Rs. 25 per person per month, and about 30 per cent lower than Rs. 15 per person per month.[2]

No country, much less a democracy, could afford to ignore such widespread deprivation. "The stage has now come," the document declared, "when we should sharply focus our efforts on providing an assured minimum income to every citizen of the country within a reasonable period of time." And this minimum itself should be raised progressively as the economy developed. To raise the standard of living of a large portion of the population, the national output would have to be "increased very considerably." Besides, some degree of inequality would have to be tolerated as "an essential part of the structure of incentives" in any growing economy. The income of the poorest segments might then be expected to rise in more or less the same proportion as the national income. These assumptions had thus far shaped economic planning.

The document, however, underlined "certain peculiarities of the Indian economy" that rendered shaky this framework. A large number of people lived in remote areas isolated from the mainstream of the

economy. Further, much of rural economic activity was only loosely integrated with the growing sectors of the economy. Finally, there was the "vast reserve of under-employed labour in rural areas (comprising landless labour, cultivators with very small agricultural holdings, artisans with primitive techniques) and their lack of mobility." The conclusion was ineluctable: "economic development is not likely to automatically lift the income of the entire population. The condition of considerable proportion of the people will remain stagnant, or at any rate, improve much less than the average, unless specific steps are taken to deal with their problems." The document estimated that 20 per cent of the Indian population fell in this category.

The central question was, of course, to decide the "minimum income" target, which could be met over the next fifteen years in successive five-year plans. The document sought to present this as a technical exercise in economic planning, while in fact it was a political issue. This was evident from the manner in which its authors arrived at the "minimum income," which also became the "poverty line." An obvious option was to work with the Nutrition Advisory Committee's recommendation for a balanced diet coupled with a modest standard of consumption for other items. This would cost approximately Rs. 35 per person per month: "by no means a high standard." Yet, if the poorest 30 per cent had to earn enough to support this standard of living by 1975, then, accounting for population growth, the economy would have to grow annually by 10 per cent over the entire period and 12 per cent during 1967–75. This was obviously out of kilter with the performance and promise of the Indian economy. "It follows," the report stated, "that the level of minimum income to be achieved in 1975 would have to be defined in more modest terms."

Having offered this economic reasoning, the document announced that it would go with "Rs. 20 per capita per month as the national minimum to be attained" by 1975. This figure was apparently "considered generally to be the bare minimum." In fact, it had been proposed by the working group on the minimum standard of living "after considerable discussion." (The amount recommended for urban dwellers was Rs. 25 per person per month.) Importantly, the figure excluded expenditure on health and education on the heroic assumption that these were

"expected to be provided by the State according to the Constitution and in the light of its other commitments."[3]

The choice of Rs. 20 as the minimum income as opposed to the Rs. 35 identified by the Nutrition Advisory Committee was clearly political. If the latter were chosen as the minimum income, then over 80 per cent of the Indian population would be consigned to beneath the poverty line. The good and the great in the working group evidently realized that it would be a damning indictment of the government and its planning apparatus. Discretion suggested a modest 43 per cent reduction in the minimum income, which still left some 60 per cent of the population beneath the poverty line. Over a decade later, Ashok Rudra, an economist who had worked in the perspective planning division at the time, wrote trenchantly: "What definition of minimum living did that distinguished group use? What statisticians did the statistical work, what data did they use, what assumptions did they use to arrive at the figure of Rs. 20? We have failed to get answers to any of the above questions from any published or unpublished sources."[4] To ask the question was to answer it.

At any rate, the Pant document touched off a hectic debate on poverty within the Planning Commission and among economists working on Indian development. Rudra himself co-authored a follow-up study in 1964, while the Planning Commission asked T.N. Srinivasan and others to produce an updated discussion paper.[5] These and other papers took as a given the poverty line of Rs. 20. Even those critical of its opaque assumptions used it as a rule of thumb, adjusting for differences between rural and urban areas. Where the original working group had proposed Rs. 20 for rural and Rs. 25 for urban dwellers, these studies discounted from the figure of Rs. 20 (at 1960–61 prices), so pushing notions of the poverty line further below. Thus, Pranab Bardhan published studies pegging the rural poverty line at Rs. 15, while B.S. Minhas fixed it at Rs. 16.66. In their influential contribution to these debates, V.M. Dandekar and Nilakantha Rath took "that level of consumer expenditure desirable which secures a diet at least in respect of calories." Initially, their calculations led them to place this at Rs. 14.17 per person per month in rural households and Rs. 22.58 in urban areas. Since their rural minimum was considerably less than the

canonical number, while their urban figure was only a bit more, "in deference" they revised the former to Rs. 15 and the latter to Rs. 22.5.[6] Looking back in the early 1970s, Amartya Sen—a thoughtful protagonist in these discussions—would quip that the "Indian poor may not be accustomed to receiving much help, but he is beginning to get used to being counted."[7]

Technical merits aside, this bevy of studies helped entrench the notion of absolute poverty identifiable by a poverty line. The drought, famine, and food shortages between 1966 and 1969 turned the spotlight on the billowing challenge of poverty. The emerging discourse pointed in the direction of targeted programs, aimed at improving the levels of subsistence of specific groups below the poverty line. It also raised, if obliquely, a related strand of the problem: population. The 1962 paper had clearly stated that the nub of the problem was economic growth being "neutralised" by rapid increase in population. Any serious assault on poverty would have to tackle this too. Indeed, population control was integral to the emerging ensemble of governmental rationality.

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Very like poverty, the challenge of population was etched deep into the developmental state. From the outset, its discourse on population was shaped by novel forms of expert knowledge—involving sociologists and economists, demographers and statisticians, medical practitioners and planners—as well as political leaders and bureaucrats. Here, too, global debates on population influenced the practices and techniques of the Indian state, principally by way of financing from Western foundations and international organizations.[8] Concerns about controlling the growth of population went back to the late nineteenth century under the colonial state.[9] Indian nationalists, too, were seized of the relationship between their claims to nationhood and the question of population. As independence neared, the nationalist leadership began focusing on the relationship between economic development and population.

The national planning committee of the Indian National Congress had a subcommittee on population led by the sociologist Radhakamal Mukherjee. He believed that "overpopulation"—understood in terms of population density and agricultural productivity—was the "most

basic" problem confronting India. Mukherjee himself drew on the concept of "optimum population" popularized by the American biologist Raymond Pearl. The subcommittee adopted this conceptual framework in its report and emphasized the need for a planned population for the success of a planned economy: "If the population is in excess of this optimum, unemployment and wastage would be inevitable." The problem, then, was calculating at this "optimum" and projecting it into the future. The nascent discipline of demography would thus be inextricably tied to the discourse on economic development and poverty. The relationship between fertility and economic growth was not uncontested, however. Nehru, who led the national planning committee, was not convinced that population control could by itself spur growth and curtail poverty. His committee acknowledged the need for "limiting excessive population" and improving its quality but underscored broad economic progress as the fundamental solution to the problems of population and poverty.[10] The circularity of these claims was evident from the outset.

After independence and the census of 1951, the Planning Commission convened a new population committee, which recommended fertility limitation both for maternal and child health and for stabilizing the population in keeping with "the requirements of the economy." In particular, it suggested free sterilization and contraception. These ideas were anathema to the first two ministers of health, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Sushila Nayar—fastidious Gandhians, who took their cue from the Mahatma's opposition to contraception and insistence on sexual abstinence. The sole approach acceptable to them was the "rhythm method," which worked by identifying "safe periods" when conception was unlikely.[11] Into this fraught policy arena landed a range of international and transnational organizations: the UN Population Commission and the World Health Organization, the Population Council and the International Planned Parenthood Federation, and, above all, the Ford Foundation.[12]

The first five-year plan adopted a policy of population limitation, though it did not specify targets. In the early years, the Indian government apportioned hardly any financial resources for population control, emphasizing instead agricultural and industrial growth that would feed

and employ the people. With the second plan in 1956, the government established a Central Family Planning Board, which by the end of the decade had set up 473 rural and 202 urban clinics—most of which were scantily staffed. The third plan, in 1961, placed the family planning program at "the very centre of planned development." The government now aimed at reducing the birth rate by 40 per cent over the following decade. The plan envisaged a massive increase in funding and infrastructure for population control. While a range of measures were rolled out to encourage a small-family norm—advertising, counselling, contraceptives—sterilization, especially of men, came to be seen as a particularly efficient procedure. Vasectomy camps were organized to create a carnivalesque milieu wherein individuals would feel emboldened but also experience peer pressure. In 1962, some 158,000 people (70 per cent men) were sterilized.[13] It is no coincidence that this shifting of gears to control fertility occurred at a time when the problem of poverty was being reconceived as an absolute, existential condition of the poor.[14]

After Indira Gandhi's accession to power, population control acquired greater salience. As a rare only child, she had a longstanding interest in family planning. During her tenure as minister of information and broadcasting under Prime Minister Shastri, she had taken the lead in disseminating family planning propaganda. She had also sought to prevail upon Sushila Nayar to pay women to accept intra-uterine device (IUD) insertions. The day after she became prime minister, the health ministry was renamed 'ministry of health and family planning', with a junior minister and dedicated staff for the latter. During her early visit to Washington, President Johnson enjoined her to take more drastic steps to curtail fertility and reduce the demand for food aid.

On returning, the prime minister put her weight behind a vigorous effort at population control. Months later, she appointed a new minister of health and family planning: Sripati Chandrasekhar. A pioneer of demography in India, Chandrasekhar had long been associated with efforts at population control. As far back as 1951, he had declared at the inaugural All-India Family Planning Conference: "Uncontrolled human fertility is one of the gravest problems of our time." Having babies "by choice and not by chance," he held, was linked not just to

individual reproductive decisions but to economic planning and national prosperity.[15] Around this time, Chandrasekhar had also set up the Indian Institute for Population Studies and began working on areas of policy concern to the government. In 1956, he had joined the Family Planning Board of the government of Madras and helped shape its population policy. Madras (later Tamil Nadu) was the first state to offer financial incentives for the adoption of birth-control measures. This reflected Chandrasekhar's oft-repeated claim that the central problem was the motivation of the individual to embrace family planning. In 1964, he had been elected to the Rajya Sabha on a Congress ticket. Now he was in the driver's seat.

Chandrasekhar swiftly embarked on a "crash programme" aimed at squeezing the birth rate from 41 per 1,000 to 25 or 20 per 1,000 "as soon as possible." He identified four problems that needed simultaneous attention: motivation, methods, money, and men. Motivation would now be improved by drawing on the latest advances in the "behavioural sciences," especially social psychology, advertising, marketing, and mass communication. "Family planning must not merely be a Government programme," he insisted, "it must become a people's programme."[16] In practice, however, methods, money, and men counted for more.

The government wheeled out a trolley of birth-control techniques and financial incentives: Rs. 11 for an IUD insertion, Rs. 30 for a vasectomy, and Rs. 40 for a tubectomy. The local bureaucracy and its sharp end were also pressed into service to support the "field workers." Between 1966 and 1973, an estimated 20.5 million couples started using modern birth-control techniques, including 14.3 million through sterilizations (11.2 million vasectomies and 3.1 million tubectomies). These impressive figures masked another factor that led couples to go in for birth control: desperation. During the years of drought across India and the famine in Bihar, nearly 300,000 "volunteered" for IUD insertion or sterilization—principally for the money.[17]

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Chandrasekhar's sense of urgency stemmed from a dread of this deepening destitution. The government knew that it had swiftly to arrest a

whirlpool of despair, which boded ill both for the Congress party and the Indian state—portents that could be glimpsed in the general elections and the Naxalbari uprising of 1967. The government's thinking was shaped by an important report prepared by the home ministry in 1969.[18]

The report noted a significant rise in agrarian tensions across the country. In particular, there was a spurt in organized agitation for higher agricultural wages and redistribution of land, as well as "forcible occupation of land and forcible harvesting of standing crops." In certain states, like Bengal, the agitation had "reached the proportions of a movement," while in others, like Tamil Nadu, it had led to grisly violence by the propertied classes against agricultural workers—including the burning to death of forty-two Dalits in the village of Keezhvenmani in the Tanjore district.[19] The report identified two fundamental causes of increasing rural discord. The first was gross inequalities in land holding. The land reforms had not benefited those at the bottom of the agrarian order: tenant farmers, sharecroppers, and landless workers. Inadequate economic development and population growth had worsened the plight of these classes: "those who do not have full tenancy rights are determined to have security of tenure and access to credit that follow it." Further, the political decision to adopt the Green Revolution strategies to boost agricultural output had deepened, even in the short run, the economic and social cleavages in rural India.

In a comprehensive note on economic policy, Haksar told the prime minister that "tens of millions still live in conditions of poverty and destitution." Unless there was "a visible and sustainable improvement . . . they will revolt with increasing violence . . . jeopardising the very survival of an orderly and democratic society." The "highest priority" was to solve "this problem of poverty and hunger."[20] The material bases of consent had to be reconstituted—in order to master the crisis of hegemony.

Thus, Haksar warned that agrarian India faced "an increasingly widening gap between prosperous cultivators who mostly belong to the irrigated tracts and the small farmer in the non-irrigated tract." The alienation of the latter was "a deep malaise," for most of them also belonged to the scheduled castes and tribes. Then there was the distinction between areas that used high-yielding varieties in wheat and rice.

In the former, especially districts in Punjab where the adoption was most widespread, "large farmers, small farmers and landless labour have all benefited from the increased income." Besides, a range of agro-processing industries had sprung up, absorbing surplus labor. By contrast, the new technology was not as well advanced in rice. Even in well-endowed monoculture rice areas such as Kuttanad in Kerala, Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu, and Burdwan in Bengal, there had only been a marginal increase in farmers' income. Landless labor and many tenant farmers had "lost ground in real income." These areas had also seen "a considerable degree of agrarian unrest."[21]

Grimmer news was in store. The first agricultural census conducted in 1970 showed that very small and barely viable holdings had significantly increased over the past decade. The number of landless laborers, too, was on the rise. A subsequent official survey of unemployment threw up more unwelcome tidings: the number of wage-seeking unemployed laborers was almost twice the figure projected on the basis of the 1961 census by official statisticians.[22] All this impelled the government to adopt a slew of central government schemes to assist landless laborers and small and marginal farmers to increase their income and consumption.

In so doing, New Delhi scooped up ideas that had been tried in certain states and hawked by economists and development experts. The government of Maharashtra had started a pilot "Employment Guarantee Scheme," which aimed at providing assured employment to agricultural laborers when they did not have seasonal work. The program would undertake manual "productive works," such as irrigation systems, and "non-productive works," which created "capital community assets" like roads and wells, pasture lands, and woodlots. The wages were fixed at "10 percent less than the normal wage in the relevant season in the previous non-scarcity year which would be considered as subsistence."[23] The Gujarat government had announced a similar "Right to Work" scheme.

The Planning Commission—reconstituted after a long "plan holiday"—was awaiting the cabinet's approval of the fourth five-year plan. The prime minister wanted to patch the new schemes on the plan. When the Planning Commission dragged its feet, she constituted a central committee comprising members from the ministries of finance and food and agriculture, as well as the Planning Commission. The

committee promptly approved these schemes. These included an experimental Crash Scheme for Rural Employment to create work for 1,000 persons per year in each district of the country. This was followed by a Drought-Prone Areas Programme, which catered to seventy-four chronically affected rural districts. The program provided subsidies on the cost of wage labor in irrigation, soil conservation, and road construction, as well as affordable loans to small and marginal farmers for improving their land. The government also set up Small Farmer Development Agencies to provide central assistance to farmers in forty-five districts. The participating farmers were eligible for a range of subsidized loans from cooperative and commercial banks; investment capital for minor irrigation and land improvement; and support for animal husbandry. A similar program for Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers was unspooled in various districts across the country—countermanding the Planning Commission's objection that it would be uneconomic.[24]

Dandekar and Rath devoted the final chapter of their book on poverty to the "Right to Gainful Work." They ended with the "hard core of the problem: Who will pay?" Their answer was higher taxes on the richest 10 per cent of the rural and urban population. Indira Gandhi was not keen on going down this route. Taxing the rural rich was a politically dicey proposition, especially ahead of general elections. It turned out that her government had another answer.

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In early August 1969, the chief minister of Tamil Nadu, M. Karunanidhi, penned an enthusiastic missive to the prime minister. "I emphatically welcome this bold step of yours," he wrote, "which is perhaps the most significant in the last 20 years of the history of independent India."[25] Two weeks earlier, Indira Gandhi had promulgated an ordinance nationalizing fourteen private banks. More than three decades on, Karunanidhi's judgment would be echoed by the official historians of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), who wrote: "It remains, without doubt, the single most important economic decision taken by any government since 1947. Not even the reforms of 1991 are comparable in their consequences—political, social and, of course, economic."[26]

These verdicts sit awkwardly with much of the writing on Indira Gandhi's decision to nationalize the banks—a decision that is rightly seen as driven by political considerations. However, in focusing all but exclusively on the *intention* behind nationalization of banks, we risk occluding its historical significance. To get the measure of this, we need to plumb the *consequences* that flowed from this decision.

Bank nationalization tremendously enhanced the "infrastructural power" of the Indian state:[27] its ability at once to syringe resources out of the society and to pursue policies aimed at securing the society. These were enabled by constructing a novel fiscal-monetary apparatus and grafting it to the focus on targeted alleviation of poverty. In the short run, it also cemented the prime minister's power vis-à-vis her party and considerably advanced her Caesarist mode of politics. Finally, when the economic temperature began to soar, it enabled her government to adopt difficult measures and showcase the muscle of the executive.

Let's start with the construction of what has aptly been described as the "fiscal-monetary machine."[28] Bank nationalization led to a major expansion of the banking network, especially in rural India. By incentivizing people to deposit their money, these bank branches soaked up the savings of a large section of society that had hitherto lain out of the formal banking system. A significant portion of these deposits was siphoned away by the government—by getting the banks to purchase government bonds. In any system, banks will hold some government securities, for these are risk-free sovereign-guaranteed assets. In the Indian case, the government cornered a big chunk of the sector's resources by legally mandating banks to hold a specified quantum of their assets—calculated as a ratio of their total deposits—in government bonds. In effect, this "Statutory Liquidity Ratio" (SLR) specified the amount of money banks had to lend to the government. Furthermore, banks were required legally to deposit a certain amount of cash, which earned no interest, with the RBI—the "Cash Reserve Ratio" (CRR). This enabled the government to borrow more from the RBI.

By steadily hiking the SLR and the CRR, the government was able to borrow an increasing proportion of the monetary system's resources and deploy it for fiscal requirements, especially for agricultural subsidies and poverty reduction programs. The SLR went from 25 per cent

in July 1969 to 36 per cent in September 1985, and the CRR from 3 per cent to 9 per cent over the same period. By the end of the long 1970s, the banks and the RBI together held 67 per cent of government securities. If we include the state-owned Life Insurance Corporation's holdings, then the nationalized financial sector accounted for a whopping 78 per cent of government debt.

At the same time, the government used the nationalized banking system to lend to poorer sections of Indian society, whose "credit worthiness" would have deterred most commercial banks. In so doing, the government effectively forced the banks to pursue its agenda of poverty reduction. Between 1969 and 1990, bank branches were opened in some 30,000 rural locations that had no financial or banking institutions. Rural lending rates were kept lower than urban rates; savings rates worked in the opposite direction. By 1990, rural households were getting almost a third of their credit from the nationalized banks. Over this period, bank expansion, savings mobilization, and provision of credit significantly influenced growth in per capita output and poverty reduction in rural India.[29]

There were, of course, limits to how far this fiscal-monetary machine could travel. For one thing, the massive "preemption" of the banking sector's resources by the government choked the flow of credit to other commercial and industrial requirements. For another, the requirements of lending to the government and poorer segments of society reduced the profitability of the banks. For a third, it enveloped the central bank in a double bind. On the one hand, the government's mounting borrowing requirements compelled the RBI to lend to it directly. This expanded the RBI's balance sheet with a multiplier effect down the banking system and the consequent risk of inflation. On the other hand, the RBI's freedom to wield its main monetary policy tool—interest rates—was abridged. All said, in the long 1970s this system did not run out of steam; though the ride was anything but smooth.

This fiscal-monetary apparatus did not spring fully formed from anyone's forehead. Policymakers and bureaucrats, economists and bankers felt their way towards constructing and tinkering, regulating and fine-tuning it. At the moment of bank nationalization, the government

had no clear ideas of what it wanted to accomplish. The discussions since 1967 on "social control of banking" had hardly moved beyond windy expressions of intent. A lengthy note prepared for the prime minister had merely underlined the need for "more intensive home work" on "equitable allocation and efficient use" of bank deposits and resources.[30] Unfortunately, the assignment had no takers because it was regarded as political hot air.

Nor did the idea of nationalization have much traction in the bureaucracy and the banking system. The then secretary to the prime minister, L.K. Jha, told her that "it would be difficult to argue that nationalisation of the banking system is necessary to increase public control over private banks." Contrary to the claims of the left-leaning "Young Turks" in the Congress party, nationalization would not reduce the flow of credit to big businesses: "One could as well ask why is it that the Railways, which are State-owned, carry such a high proportion of freight which emanates from the bigger industrial groups." The government, he argued, had adequate control over the financial system to channel industrial and agricultural credit.[31] Two months later, Jha was appointed as the governor of the RBI. When Indira Gandhi decided to take the plunge, Governor Jha was kept out of the loop until the last minute—owing to his dislike of the idea. The speed and secrecy with which the move was executed ensured that no expert, barring I.G. Patel in the finance ministry, was consulted. When the announcement was made on 20 July 1969, the government—like the dog that caught the car—had quickly to decide what next to do.

The immediate concern was to deal with the organizational changes necessitated by this move. Thereafter, the legal challenge to bank nationalization in the supreme court consumed substantial energies of the government. Yet the prime minister knew from the outset that she needed expert knowledge and policy advice. Among those to whom she first turned was the chairman of the Syndicate Bank, T.A. Pai. A progressive banker from Manipal in Karnataka, Pai's thoughts proved influential in shaping the discourse on the fiscal-monetary apparatus. Not surprisingly, Pai would later join the Congress party and serve in Indira Gandhi's third cabinet.

Pai suggested two principal objectives for the nationalized banking system: broadening the base of banking and paying attention to neglected sectors. India had hardly 12 million bank accounts for a population of 500 million. The challenge was "to convert a system of class banking into banking for the masses." The banks had total deposits of Rs. 43 billion, when, by international standards, the deposits should have stood at least at Rs. 120 billion. Worse, half of the existing deposits came from just three states: Maharashtra, Gujarat, and West Bengal. By contrast, six states accounting for 40 per cent of the population—Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Orissa, and Assam—contributed a paltry 6 per cent of the deposits. "It is imperative therefore that banking should spread more intensively in all these states."[32]

Conversely, the Indian banking system had only 1.8 million borrowing accounts. Syndicate Bank had the highest, with 180,000 accounts, while the State Bank of India, with 10 times the loans, had only 122,000 borrowing accounts. "This shows that the banks are catering only to a few in the country and when we know that nearly 600 accounts have borrowed 50 per cent of the total advances viz. Rs. 15 billion we can appreciate the tragedy of the situation." Bank credit, he argued, could "act as a potential catalytic in the economic growth of the people." The new system should have clear priorities, such as small-scale industry, retail trade, self-employed professionals, students, and agriculture. Bank finance, he wrote, "must make even subsistence farmers into surplus farmers." Instead of aiming at annual increases in credit to agriculture and industry, targets should be linked to "the total advances as a percentage to be achieved within a reasonable period."

In the days after the nationalization, the bureaucracy was humming with rumors of Governor Jha's imminent resignation. Indira Gandhi requested him to stay in saddle: "I shall need to rely a great deal on you . . . It should be possible for you to pick out the priority areas for action . . . so that we can give the people the feeling that the nationalisation of banks will affect their lives in some concrete way."[33] Jha promptly sent her two detailed notes. The governor observed that "concern for the underprivileged sections of the community and the desirability of improving their access to credit facilities can be said to be one of the prime objectives of nationalisation." He listed several "areas for special

attention": "small scale industries, retail trade, specially in the rural areas, individuals who operate their own trucks or autorickshaws on hire . . . the self-employed generally. Artisans like carpenters and tailors, people who run service and repair establishments." In short, the more productive segments of the emerging informal economy. Further, with the advent of the Green Revolution, there was "a much greater need for credit for the farmer both for his inputs and for his marketing." The nationalized banks should adopt "a rationalised programme of branch expansion . . . paying special attention to those States and those parts of the country which have so far been neglected."[34]

Having focused on constructing the capillaries of the new apparatus and on enabling the flow of credit to poorer sections, Jha turned to the apex and its requirements. Banks were required by law to maintain 25 per cent of their deposits in government securities (the Statutory Liquidity Ratio) and 3 per cent of their deposits as cash (Cash Reserve Ratio) with the RBI. "After nationalisation," he wrote, "a progressive step up in the investment of the banking system in Government securities will be undertaken to bring the level of investment around 30 percent and this can be achieved without any change in the law."[35] The governor had put his finger on an open sesame. But he would rapidly be disabused of his hope for a gradual increase and a moderate ceiling. Within months, the government escalated the SLR and CRR rather close to Jha's 30 per cent. By the mid-1980s, they added up to 67 per cent.

"This is a good beginning," wrote Indira Gandhi after perusing the notes, asking Haksar to read them too.[36] A week later, she wrote to Jha "broadly agree[ing] with the guidelines you have proposed." She wanted the governor to convey to the chairmen of the banks the "urgent economic and social purpose" animating the nationalization. The prime minister had jotted down "some of the questions which come to mind"—questions that had been percolating since Pai's memorandum—which she sent along:

> What would be the most practicable ways of making the common man feel that he has a stake in development of banking? What facilities can nationalised banks offer to people who do not have banking habits so far to become depositors, particularly smaller people in the

> countryside? How do banks propose to reach categories like small farmers, artisans . . . to show them that they can actually borrow from banks even small sums of a few hundred rupees for productive purposes, however humble? Are the prevailing ideas about opening of branches the best even in the new situation? If not, what should be the lines of improvement?[37]

In his meeting with the bank chairmen, Jha circulated these questions. The bankers felt that to create a stake in the banking system for "the common man," the system would have "to be extended both functionally and geographically so as to involve men of small means as well as people in non-urban and rural centres . . . to start extending credit facilities not only to small scale industries but to small business of all kinds." As for inducing people to deposit their money, "the best way . . . would be to make loans available to them." One banker suggested a slogan: "for every one rupee deposited the bank would lend two rupees." The chairmen also agreed to devise a plan for extending bank branches "before the end of the month and implementation would proceed straightaway."[38] The banks were ready to line up behind the government's agenda.

At the end of September 1969, the prime minister met the chairmen of the nationalized banks and set forth her priorities for the new system. Making a clean break with the past entailed a couple of things. First, "mobilisation of deposits in all parts of the country and from all sections of the people ranging from affluent businessmen to the harassed housewife." The banks had to open branches "on a very much wider scale than before in villages and small towns in the quickest possible time." "It is well known," she claimed, "that the aggregate of deposits which can be collected from ordinary people in relatively small places is very much larger than the yet untapped savings available in cities and large towns."[39]

Indira Gandhi further insisted that "deposit mobilisation and lending must go together, that is to say, lending will not remain to be taken up as a separate operation only after deposits start flowing in handsome measure." On the contrary, in underdeveloped areas "lending will deliberately have to be made the first step, in the expectation that

collection of deposits will follow." The prime minister explicitly braided these measures with her larger concerns about poverty: "At a time when with increase in population the number of employable but unemployed is rising unpleasantly fast . . . one constantly hears of the small man borrowing from the unorganised sector at 20% interest or above . . . [This] strikes me as a matter for serious concern."

Meanwhile, Haksar pulled together his own thoughts on how bank nationalization could consort with the emerging approach to poverty alleviation.[40] "With bank nationalisation," he wrote, "a major instrument of change has now become available to the Government." A major problem, "foremost in my mind," was "the plight and neglect of small farmers in the dry farming area." The better-off cultivators in the irrigated tracts had taken all the plums: government schemes and subsidies, as well as loans from banks and cooperatives. By contrast, small farmers in the non-irrigated areas were cut adrift. "The plight and misery of this large strata of our rural sector deserves our urgent and most sympathetic consideration. While devising schemes . . . this section of the people will have to be given highest priority."

Another "serious concern" was increasing unemployment. The mounting disaffection and despair in such a large segment of the society could "strike at the very root of stability and progress." In consequence, some immediate steps must be taken to "create more avenues of self-employment" both in rural and urban areas. "Only by opening new avenues of employment in the rural areas," Haksar insisted, "can we reduce the flow of rural youth to urban centres." An effective answer could be agro-based and small-scale rural industries. Hitherto, a major constraint was the unavailability of finance. "With bank nationalisation, we should be able to make a new beginning."

Soon the government was preparing to hitch this incipient fiscal-monetary apparatus with the fourth five-year plan's focus on targeted poverty alleviation. In January 1970, Haksar informed the prime minister that their desire to embed a slew of targeted anti-poverty programs on the fourth five-year plan was proceeding apace. The Planning Commission had approved an additional outlay of 10.3 per cent (Rs. 14.81 billion) in the public sector for the period 1969–74, taking the total to Rs. 158.71 billion. Haksar assured her that "There

will be no addition to deficit financing as envisaged in the original draft [of the plan]." These additional outlays were premised on enhanced borrowing by the central and state governments, as well as state enterprises. "The vigorous programme of branch expansion of banks now proposed will facilitate larger mobilisation of deposits."

The central government's schemes would cover "agriculture, health, family planning and welfare of backward classes." These were "calculated to create additional employment" in rural areas. The plan now embodied a large provision of Rs. 2 billion "for a programme of productive rural works which will provide employment on a large scale in rural areas." This would be "specially oriented towards helping small farmers, landless labourers and people in chronically drought-affected areas." Besides, there was a special provision for farming schemes in dry areas.[41] The fiscal-monetary machine was revving into action.

In all, the commercial banks were expected to contribute Rs. 9.55 billion over the five-year period: Rs. 8 billion by purchasing government and state-owned entities' bonds, and the remainder as credit to the Food Corporation of India for holding buffer stocks. Within months, however, the Planning Commission realized that its expectations of the banking system had been a touch too rosy. The RBI's data showed an expansion in bank branches, with corresponding improvement in aggregate deposits. But the rate of deposit accretion had fallen short of expectations because deposits per branch had gone down. The Planning Commission warned that "effective steps are called for to improve the rate of deposit accretion to commercial banks if projections of banks' contributions to Plan resources are not to be disturbed." The alternative was, of course, steeper hikes in the SLR and CRR to sluice more out of the banking system.[42]

The prime minister was prepared to discipline the RBI. By this time, Jha had quit and been succeeded by another senior bureaucrat, S. Jagannathan. In a meeting with the new governor, Indira Gandhi bluntly conveyed her "strong impression . . . that the Reserve Bank, as an institution is not in good shape." Above all, it was "ill-equipped to deal with the situation which has arisen since the nationalisation of the fourteen banks." She felt that "something drastic and serious had to be

done." The prime minister expressed her confidence in the new governor, but hoped that the bank would enter a new period of efficiency: "For this, hard work would be required."[43] Three weeks later, the new finance minister, Y.B. Chavan, met the heads of the nationalized banks and declared that deposit mobilization was "a matter of supreme importance" and constituted the "first strategy in the war on poverty." Unsurprisingly, the RBI hiked the SLR for the third time in the year: from 25 per cent to 26 in February, to 27 in April and to 28 per cent in August 1970.[44]

The Congress (R) manifesto ahead of the 1971 general elections spoke of central government programs to support small farmers and the landless, as well as providing "poor people unattached to land . . . with new opportunities for gainful employment." It also emphasized the turn towards "a new credit programme, by extending credit facilities to small farmers, self-employed persons and economically neglected sectors and areas."[45] The fiscal-monetary apparatus thus enabled Indira Gandhi at once to dissolve the local filaments of patronage that had long sustained the Congress party and to substitute them with a growing network of bank branches. The latter would buoy her ability directly to connect with the electorate. The fiscal-monetary apparatus was the financial kernel of the Caesarist politics that she had inaugurated.

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After Indira Gandhi strode to power in 1971 and took the states in a canter the next year, economic issues came to the fore. Now, she also had a new set of colleagues and advisors on these matters. Haksar had inducted the economist P.N. Dhar into the prime minister's secretariat in late 1970 as advisor and would soon hand over the charge to him, while remaining an important presence. A professor at the Delhi School of Economics, Dhar was a most unusual choice for the job. Indira Gandhi and Haksar had known him only since the mid-1960s. He had no experience of government, and his views on economic policy were not congruent with those of her other advisors. But Dhar had a lucid, reflective, and independent cast of mind, as well as a tactful demeanor that the prime minister and her secretary came to appreciate.

A second advisor was Mohan Kumaramangalam. An old friend of Indira Gandhi's and Haksar's from England in the 1930s, Kumaramangalam hailed from a prominent political family in Tamil Nadu. His cursus included Eton, Cambridge, and a long stint in the Communist Party of India. After serving as the advocate general in his state, Kumaramangalam formally joined the Congress party under Indira Gandhi, which he regarded as the best vehicle to take India towards socialism. In March 1971, he was inducted into the new cabinet as minister of steel. Finally, there was D.P. Dhar, who had returned from Moscow at the height of the Bangladesh crisis and was appointed minister of planning in July 1972. Given the presence of Haksar, Kumaramangalam, and D.P. Dhar, it is not surprising that the government sought to double down on its line of attack on poverty. This was amply demonstrated by the approach paper to the fifth five-year plan, which the Planning Commission prepared soon after the 1972 elections.

P.N. Dhar summarized the lengthy document for the prime minister.[46] There could be no pithier account of the governmental rationality now at work in the highest reaches of the Indian state. Reduction of poverty should be the main thrust of the next plan: "About two-fifths of our population totalling about 220 million people live below the poverty line." The main causes of poverty were urban employment, underemployment, and the low base of resources for a large number of producers in agriculture. Acceleration of the rate of growth would not by itself eliminate poverty. "Direct attack should be made on the problems of unemployment, under-employment and massive low-end poverty." During the fourth plan a number of special employment schemes had been initiated; now these should be "integrated with the plan itself." And there was more to do.

The plan should seek to meet the following "basic minimum needs": elementary education for ages 6–11; minimum public health facilities integrated with family planning and nutrition for children; supply of drinking water; home sites for landless labor; provision of all-weather roads in every village above a population of 15,000; rural electrification to reach 30–40 per cent of the rural population, including in the least developed states; and improvement of slums in 18 cities.

This program of basic minimum needs would cost Rs. 30–35 billion. The employment programs would need Rs. 75–80 billion. The total requirement would be to the tune of Rs. 105–115 billion. The total outlay for the fifth plan was around Rs. 300 billion, so these poverty-targeting programs would account for more than a third. This would require additional taxation of the order of Rs. 60–75 billion. On average, the central government would have to raise Rs. 25–30 billion for each year of the plan, and the state governments Rs. 15–20 billion. Mobilization on this scale would entail bringing agricultural income into the tax net, mopping up surpluses from existing wealth, and strict action against tax evasion. At the same time, the plan intended to achieve "self-sufficiency" by working towards "zero net aid" by the end of the decade.

Secretary Dhar proceeded to flag several questions for the prime minister to raise with the deputy chairman of the Planning Commission—questions that showcased his own economic instincts. Had they suggested this range of taxation "because they find that so much money is required for the programs in view or because their analysis has shown that this order of tax effort is feasible"? Without knowing this, it was "not possible to judge whether the targets are at all feasible." As for reducing aid to net zero, was the objective of self-reliance "only a hypothesis or a goal of economic policy"? Summing up his skepticism, Dhar argued, "there is no doubt that a direct line of attack on poverty is highly desirable. The question still remains as to what is the best way of going about it."[47]

In the event, ideological conviction carried the day over economistic quibbling. But economic gravity soon caught up with the soaring ambition of the war on poverty. By October 1972, the rate of inflation (measured by wholesale price index) stood at 10 per cent. Supply-side constraints apart, this was driven substantially by the huge increase in money supply over the past three years: 20 per cent in October 1969–70; 11 per cent in October 1970–71; 12 per cent in October 1971–72. This spurt in money supply was a direct consequence of the rise in net bank credit to the government via the fiscal-monetary machine. "There was nothing the bank could do about it," lamented the RBI's historians, "except monetize the deficits—and vainly exhort industry to produce

more."[48] In fact, the industry was placed on a diet to meet the government's insatiable appetite for borrowing. But debt is a "*pharmakon*": at once medicine and poison.[49] And the reckoning was soon at hand. As the economy started overheating, the RBI in May 1973 hiked the bank rate from 6 to 7 per cent and interest rates across the board. Yet the demand for credit from industry did not abate, nor did the prices subside. In June, inflation ratcheted up to 20.6 per cent.[50]

Independent minds within the Planning Commission were also tolling the knell about inflationary financing. B.S. Minhas pointedly questioned the financial assumptions of the fifth plan against the backcloth of scaling inflation. He unerringly identified the crux of the problem. "The reasons for the erosion of resources in money terms," he noted, "were not far to seek." Almost the entire amount of deficit financing in recent years and a good portion of borrowing from banks had been deployed for drought relief, special programs, and military expenditure. "Almost all of this expenditure is of an unproductive nature . . . it does not yield resources which can be further invested." Precisely for this reason, the fourth plan's financial estimates had gone completely awry. "Without stern fiscal discipline, proper expenditure control and reasonable price stability," he warned, "the Fifth Plan is likely to meet the same fate." The plan in its present form was "infeasible, hence incapable of being implemented." Any scheme of financing that was "likely to generate further inflationary pressure, would be inconsistent with our objective of removal of poverty."[51] The price of speaking his mind was, of course, Minhas's departure from the Planning Commission. But he had accurately foreseen the impending economic disaster.

5

YEARS OF UPHEAVAL

In early July 1971, as the Bangladesh crisis deepened, Haksar wrote an alarmed letter to the cabinet secretary. He had received a document routinely prepared for the cabinet by the ministry of industrial development. Haksar "noted with concern" that the statistics included therein showed that the rate of growth of industrial output for the calendar year 1969 was only 4.7 per cent. "This is substantially less than that of the preceding year," he wrote, "and about a half of the target under the Fourth Plan." Worse, for January 1971, "the growth rate works out to something less than half of one per cent. Obviously, our industrial sector is performing at a level which is below even the average performance of the economy." This state of affairs, he grimly noted, was "fraught with serious dangers to the economy." It was imperative to constitute a task force to look into the industrial situation.[1]

Over the next two years, the Indira Gandhi government continued to flounder. Indian industry remained in a deep funk, accelerating the spiral of inflation triggered by monetary expansion. Economists have debated the causes of this industrial stagnation, offering explanations ranging from the Indian state's unwillingness to carry out land reforms and its inability to discipline the capitalists, to a decline in public investment and the policy stranglehold on private enterprises.[2] From a historical perspective, this phase of industrial slowdown is important because it marked a point of inflection in the state's approach to regulating the economy: towards relaxation of the system of controls and emergence

of a pro-business outlook. This, too, was an important part of the novel ensemble of governmental rationality in India's long 1970s.

The inaugural moment of Indira Gandhi's premiership was marked by her willingness to pursue economic liberalization policies pressed upon her by the World Bank and the United States. On the advice of the mandarins in the ministry of finance, as well as Secretary L.K. Jha, she pressed ahead with devaluation of the rupee. The ensuing political storm gave pause to the prime minister. Thereafter, her escalating struggle with the party bosses led her to espouse "socialist" policies. However, this impulse for greater dirigisme was not purely political. Very like the shift in the discourse on poverty, it, too, stemmed from the perceived failures of the early developmental state. Unlike the anti-poverty policies, though, this drive towards greater control of the economy proved short-lived. As the economic outlook darkened, Indira Gandhi's government was forced fitfully to move towards greater deregulation and more accommodative policies towards business. The long 1970s thus placed the Indian economy on the road to liberalization—if only via a crooked path.

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The Industrial Policy Resolution of 1956 had envisaged the planned national development of a mixed economy with a dominant state or public sector and the private sector subject to control and regulation. The resolution had created three categories of industries: the first in which the state would exercise a monopoly—including iron and steel (with the exception of the Tatas), defence and atomic energy, railways, shipbuilding, and power; a second in which the state would take the lead but allow the private sector to participate; and the rest would be left to private enterprise. The five-year plans would set detailed targets for various industries, and private companies had to compete for government licenses to establish firms. The resolution had spoken of aiming at a "socialistic pattern of society" and underscored the need "to reduce disparities in income and wealth . . . prevent private monopolies and concentration of economic power." Here the resolution had reprised the directive principles of state policy in the Indian constitution.

Speaking in parliament in August 1960, Jawaharlal Nehru had observed: "It is said that the national income over the First and Second

Plans has gone up by 42 per cent and the per capita income by 20 per cent . . . we should enquire more deeply into where this has gone." Part of the answer that emerged after the census of 1961 was unanticipated growth in population. This concern with inequality had led to the appointment of a committee on "distribution of income and levels of living," chaired by the head of the Planning Commission, P.C. Mahalanobis, and including the economist V.K.R.V. Rao (also a member of the 1962 working group on poverty).[3]

Among the committee's terms of reference was to "ascertain the extent to which the operation of the economic system has resulted in the concentration of wealth and means of production." An interim report in 1964 concluded that the workings of the planned economy had led to the creation of big businesses that were supported by public financial institutions and bank credit for industrial expansion. Notwithstanding "all the countervailing measures taken . . . concentration of economic power in the private sector is more than what could be justified as necessary on functional grounds." The committee underlined the importance of the industrial licensing system to forestall the emergence of monopolies. It also called for further studies on "economic power" in the private sector to craft appropriate policies.[4]

These findings led in April 1964 (just before Nehru's death) to the constitution of a Monopolies Inquiry Commission under a supreme court judge, Vivian Bose. The commission's majority report tabled the following year noted that "the planned economy . . . has proved to be a potent factor for further concentration." Industrial licensing policy, far from thwarting monopolies, was instrumental in their creation. Big business had an advantage in securing licenses for starting new industries or for expanding the existing capacity. This licensing regime had also "restricted freedom of entry into industry and so helped to produce concentration." All things considered, the majority report proceeded to affirm that economic concentration had helped the industrial growth of India and would do so in the future. "We need not strike at the concentration of economic power as such," it cautiously concluded, "but should do so only when it becomes a menace to the best production (in quality and quantity) or to fair distribution." To ensure this, the commission recommended the establishment of a statutory commission.[5]

In the emerging discourse on monopolies and concentration of wealth, the concept of "economic power" acquired salience. This was no longer understood as a political idea as in the 1956 Resolution or the constitution's directive principles, but rather as a quantifiable and measurable concept—one that was capable of directing the state's action against specific groups or individuals. This conceptual shift stemmed from the work of a young economist in Bombay University, R.K. Hazari. Since early 1958, Hazari had been engaged in a study that sought to measure the proportion of corporate assets controlled by twenty large and medium-sized business groups between 1951 and 1958. After his first article on the subject was published, the Planning Commission had supported his research, which had fed directly into the Mahalanobis committee's work. In 1964, Hazari submitted his final report, which was subsequently published as a book.

Hazari's work turned on the proposition that in the Indian context "the business group, not the individual joint stock company, is the unit of decision and, therefore, of economic power." His study covered 1,000 public and private companies in which 20 selected corporate groups had an interest. These groups had increased their share of all corporate private capital, including public and private companies, from 29.2 per cent in 1951 to 32.4 per cent in 1958. The share of the four largest groups, including the famous Tata and Birla houses, had risen over this period from 21.9 per cent to 26.6 per cent. Hazari also analyzed in detail the methods used by these groups to expand and consolidate their positions. Controlling families themselves made relatively small investments, while pulling resources from other groups in the company. Hazari himself was ambivalent about this process, arguing that owing to the steep and urgent needs of the economy this increase in concentration might have economic and technological payoffs.[6] Yet this bout of iconoclasm bestirred the government.

In July 1966, Hazari was appointed by the Planning Commission to review the functioning of the industrial licensing regime. He was specifically asked to examine whether this regime had furthered the broad objectives of industrial policy: to support the priorities and targets of the plans; to avoid monopoly and concentration of wealth; and to encourage new entrepreneurs to establish industries. The government

knew that the system was not delivering as desired. The capacity created in many industries was well short of the plan targets, so imparting a misshapen muscularity to Indian industrial growth.

Six months on, Hazari submitted an interim report whose findings were elaborated in his final report the following year. His analysis showed that the share of large and medium-sized groups, which almost coincided with his twenty groups, in the total number of applications for licenses had gone up from 20 per cent in 1959 to 29 per cent in 1964–66. Their share in applications approved had increased over the same period from 28 per cent to 30 per cent. These groups accounted for no less than one half of the total private investment. Within them, Tata had "hardly been active," while Birla had "made a strident advance." The Birla group had submitted 8.5 per cent of applications in 1964–66 and secured 8 per cent of approvals: an approval rate of almost 100 per cent. Its share of private investment, too, had shot up, to 15.5 per cent. Birla's proposals were "diffused over the entire industrial structure except basic steel and power generation." Hazari argued that the Birla group had also made multiple applications for each category, so tending to "pre-empt licensable capacity" in many industries.[7]

The report succinctly showed how big business was able to work the licensing system, though Hazari did not suggest any political malfeasance: "Enterprise plus imaginative understanding of licensing formalities, thus, enable the Birlas to foreclose the market. Astute management turns this process into high and quick returns on investment, which earns foreclosure of economic resources generally, and helps magnify the halo round the House of Birla." After a long catalogue of flaws, Hazari concluded that the deficiencies of the licensing system were "so fundamental that they cannot be overcome by procedural or administrative changes." The scope and operations of the system needed an overhaul.

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While Hazari was working on his report, Indira Gandhi had commenced liberalization of the licensing regime in line with the recommendations of the World Bank and the understanding with the United States. Industrial units were initially permitted to diversify up to 25 per cent of

their production, provided this needed no additional foreign exchange. Later, they were allowed to increase production up to 125 per cent of the licensed capacity, even if it entailed import of raw materials. Lastly, certain select industries were altogether exempted from the licensing regime. The Hazari report helped stop in its tracks this move towards further liberalization—though Indira Gandhi was also unwilling to invest political capital after the furore over devaluation.

In July 1967, the government appointed another committee to inquire into the industrial licensing system. The new committee was chaired by Subimal Dutt, a retired civil servant and diplomat who had worked closely with Nehru as foreign secretary, and included as member Mohan Kumaramangalam. The committee's report submitted in July 1969 concluded that "the licensing system as it actually worked could not ensure the development of industries mainly according to plan priorities." But this was principally owing to a lack of clarity about plan targets and their concrete implications for creating industrial capacity; the failure of the planners to work out priorities among different industries; and the absence of "any properly worked out industry Plan on the basis of which individual decisions on licensing could be taken within a rational framework." In other words, reforming the licensing required more "rational" planning and controls rather than fewer.

The committee recommended reforming and continuing the licensing system: "if the problems the country faced are to be solved with speed, we cannot but continue on the path of planned development . . . [and] it is essential to have an instrument for industrial planning."[8] The report conceded that licensing could play only a limited role in checking monopolies and that this would require a statutory body—not least because once the licensing policy was reformed, "the use of various subterfuges to obtain licenses through nominees or to acquire control over concerns which have obtained licenses is likely to become more widespread."

The turn towards more ramified controls followed soon. In February 1970, the government made major changes to the industrial licensing policy in line with the recommendations of the Dutt committee. The principal objective was to restrict larger business houses and foreign firms to industries that needed heavy investment (defined as more than

Rs. 50 million). The new system would be supervised by a licensing committee, with members from various ministries, including finance and planning. Three months later, the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices (MRTP) Act came into existence. Some categories of business now had to secure government approval before setting up a new industrial unit or embarking on substantial expansion. This was in addition to the need for an industrial license under the new policy. To compound the confusion, the MRTP had a different system of defining such entities. As with licensing, an inter-ministerial advisory committee was set up to examine each case, and the final approval rested with the cabinet committee on economic coordination.

The government also tightened the norms for lending to big business. An equity conversion clause was included in loans of more than Rs. 5 million from public financial institutions, giving the latter—and by extension the government—a stronger hold on the borrowing firm. Further, shares pledged to secure bank loans of more than Rs. 50,000 had to be transferred with voting rights to the lending bank. Since commercial banks were nationalized, this, too, amounted to the tightening of the government's grip over the private sector. Lastly, the government fine-tuned its policy on foreign investment and collaboration. It published an illustrative list of industries in which foreign investment or technical collaboration would and would not be permitted. Foreign equity participation in joint ventures was, as a rule, capped at 40 per cent. In "rare cases," 49 per cent might be allowed. Majority foreign participation was considered "only in very exceptional circumstances, either on grounds of technology or where a major proportion of the production is intended for exports."[9] Proposals for foreign investment were considered by a foreign investment board, led by a senior mandarin of the finance ministry. Subsequently, in 1973, the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act was adopted to control the repatriation of profits by multinational firms.

After the 1971 war, when the Nixon administration cut all aid to India, American firms came under the scanner. Two US oil firms, Exxon and Caltex, which accounted for nearly 50 per cent of all American private investment in India, were jittered by the possibility of nationalization. Large American pharmaceuticals also came "under close scrutiny."

The latter were already facing a more competitive market following the Indian Patents Act legislated in 1970, allowing Indian manufacturers to produce internationally patented drugs at home.[10] By early 1973, the CIA noted, the flow of American private investment to India had "shrunk to practically nothing." Worse, many American firms in India were "trying to accelerate the repatriation of profits, reserves and other capital before the situation deteriorates further."[11]

Taken together, the new licensing regime, the MRTP, and the credit and foreign investment policies, as well as their institutional structures, were clearly aimed at controlling the growth of big business houses and their foreign partners and at enabling smaller private players and public sector companies to enter the fray. It did not work out like that.

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By the summer of 1971, after Haksar's alarm, the government was fretting about crawling industrial growth. A flurry of high-level meetings ensued—chaired by the ministers of planning and of industrial development, and, inevitably, the prime minister. It gradually dawned on them that the nub of the problem lay in their own policies and practices. In the blizzard of notes and memoranda prepared by the bureaucracy, an analysis by the economic advisor in the ministry of finance stood out for its clarity.[12] Industrial growth had been no more than 1 per cent for the first four months of 1971. Drawing on data from the RBI and other financial institutions, he observed that the sluggish growth was related to a slowdown over the past five years in the rate of investment in the economy, including industrial investment and investment by the private corporate sector. As a percentage of gross national product, private investment had steadily climbed down from 6.4 per cent in 1965–66 to 5.1 per cent in 1970–71. The spirits of private capital were evidently sunk.

The note identified a host of other factors holding down industrial growth: shortage of steel owing to decline in production; shortfall of critical raw materials; and inadequate use of existing capacity in public sector enterprises, as well as in the private sector. The latter was particularly constrained on two further counts: lack of availability of adequate credit from banks and procedural delays in getting government approvals,

"be they for the establishment of industrial undertakings or for import of capital goods or raw materials etc." Finally, there was the problem of inflation and lack of price stability.

The challenge was that tackling one set of causes could aggravate the others. For instance, insufficient credit hampered production. Yet an increase in credit could directly enhance inflation, which in turn would dampen savings and depress investment. The situation, the note argued, demanded "simultaneous effort on a number of fronts, as also a delicate balance between alternative instruments of [economic] policy." In the short run, the only way to ramp up production swiftly was to use fully the existing industrial capacity. The government had already started loosening the import licensing policy. Yet "our import procedures continue to be time consuming." The licensing regime had "far too many agencies in charge" and a "sheer multiplicity of the number and stages of approval." The note concluded that the government now needed "a drastic and qualitative change in our entire approach."

Meanwhile, the prime minister received two notes sent separately to her by senior experts in economic policy within the government. Interestingly, both notes converged on a similar line of analysis, framework, and policy recommendations. P.N. Dhar had been conveying to her the sharp decline in industrial growth and its implications. "Some of our recent policies," he candidly wrote, were "the result of what are called political compulsions." He was, of course, referring to the sharp dirigiste turn taken under the banner of an advance towards socialism. "I have a lurking fear," he continued, "that we may be doing things which are just the opposite of what basic political compulsions call for." He teamed up with Sukhamoy Chakravarty, the economist and member of the Planning Commission, who shared his concerns, to prepare a note aimed explicitly at "the most progressive groups of the Congress party."[13]

Titled "Economics of Transition to Socialism," Chakravarty and Dhar's note effectively made the case for capitalism. Peaceful transition to socialism, they began, had been the avowed objective of the Congress party since 1956. But there was no readily available blueprint for the mechanics of this transition. Marx himself expected socialism to arrive only after capitalism had done its work, and he recognized the role of capitalists as accumulating agents.[14]

The planned economy had over two decades led to a costly industrial structure with considerable concentration of productive assets in relatively few business groups. As a reaction, the government had tried through policy and legislative action "to curb the growth of dominant undertakings." Yet the policy "ignores a number of relevant economic factors," including the need for economies of scale and acceleration of technological change. Indeed, "the policy has helped slow down the rates of growth of industrial production." The public sector was essential for any transition to socialism. But it had to be "efficient . . . [and] generate sufficient surplus." Since the public sector was financed by resources "largely wrung out of the people through deficit financing and indirect taxes," its inefficiency was deeply damaging. All this, they argued, showed that "a policy of growth pursued essentially in the name of helping the less privileged has ended up making the status quo even more oppressive."

What was to be done? Above all, "we must revive the industrial sector." In so doing, there would be "important constraints" on how much the public sector could do. There were only two alternatives. The first was to nationalize at one stroke all private industry—a course that was politically ruled out. The other, viable, option was to "allow capacity to expand in the more efficient and large-sized units so that production of commodities especially in the core and heavy [investment] sectors may increase to the fastest extent." This would require reconsidering the workings of the MRTP Act, which was retarding industrial growth.

Asok Mitra, a retired mandarin in the Planning Commission, wrote directly to the prime minister, insisting that "a firm view should be taken without delay."[15] Political and economic growth, he argued, had "an inalienable complementarity." In politics, India had accepted the path of competition. In the economy, too, the principle of competition must be fostered. "The economic field," he observed, "still calls for a greater measure of efficiency that is ordinarily associated with bourgeois democratic economic set-ups before the process of socialist pattern can set in." The public sector enterprises would benefit from having to "consolidate its position through competitive performance." Conversely, if industrial growth languished in the private sector, "the public sector itself will be deleteriously affected and its performance will suffer still

more." Given the dire industrial situation, he urged that "a far more liberalisation policy [*sic*] should be adopted, even if purely as a temporary measure to stimulate industrial growth." This should be done through the liberalization of licensing and imports, "progressive removal" of "messy and time wasting procedural controls," and a fuller utilization of existing industrial capacity.

As the economy slid further down the slope, these ideas gained more traction. In January 1972 the industrial licensing policy was loosened in a bid to ensure fuller use of available capacity. The relaxation did not apply automatically to the larger industrial groups and foreign firms. Certain industries, such as agricultural tractors and machinery, fertilizers and basic metals, iron and steel, were allowed to increase their output to double the production levels specified in their licenses—provided no additional investment was required.

The Planning Commission's approach paper on the fifth five-year plan was prepared with inputs from Mohan Kumaramangalam. Interestingly, he conceded many of the points flagged by the advocates of liberalization, while also pressing the case for the public sector and selective nationalization of "such industries in the private sector which are being run inefficiently or in a manner that goes against the national interest (e.g., copper)." The paper admitted that "inefficiency of the private sector cannot be made a justification for the continuance of inefficiency in the public sector which must be ended." Further, it called for a reform of the licensing system that would "cut through delays that have become inevitable under the present procedure"—a policy sired by Kumaramangalam. More strikingly, it concurred that the current policy of restricting the expansion of large businesses was "not really egalitarian in any sense of the term." Rather, it only amounted to "some redistribution in the top of our income bracket."[16]

The minister of planning, C. Subramaniam, now insisted that "a way has to be found" to rapidly enhance industrial output. In most key industries, "the quickest and cheapest" way of doing this would be through the expansion of existing production units. "The fact that some of these are controlled or owned by larger industrial houses," he insisted, "should not come in the way of the economy benefitting through their expansion."[17] Three months later, Subramaniam would

take over the ministry of industrial development. The prime minister herself was increasingly alert to the problems of licensing. A director of the Tata group wrote to Haksar that their application for expansion of capacity of Tata Electrical Company had been lost in the bureaucratic labyrinth and hadn't yet come up to the cabinet. Haksar sent it to the prime minister, scribbling on the margins: "PM may wish to speak to the Minister of Industry or have him spoken to. These delays are scandalous." Indira Gandhi agreed.[18]

The government also tapped the private sector, including the big business groups, for their ideas on reviving the economy. In May 1972, J.R.D. Tata submitted a memorandum titled "Suggestions for Accelerating Industrial Growth." He opened the note by stating that he proposed no radical change in the government's industrial policy. Yet he went on to identify a series of problems and possible solutions. To ensure full use of installed capacity and encourage expansion, power, transport, raw material, and labor were essential. Further, the government should reform the existing licensing regime and create a streamlined and expeditious process.[19]

For a sustained trajectory of industrial development, he argued, the government must abandon its bias against the bigger houses, embodied in the MRTP Act. Concentration of economic wealth had been given "excessive prominence because of the misdeeds of a few groups." Rather than absolute restrictions on the size or market share of business groups, the government should consider their applications case by case and grant approvals to those whose record and practices were "consistently above reproach." Similarly, blanket bans on bank lending against equity must be dropped to revive private investment. Finally, Tata pushed for a "joint sector" in industry. Tata Steel could not raise enough capital to double its installed capacity, but the government could create a new holding company with 51 per cent equity while handing over actual management to the Tatas. This model could be replicated in other public and private sectors.

This particular idea was not destined to travel far—not least because the Communist Party of India published a scathing critique of the Tata memorandum, attacking the proposal and arguing that Indira Gandhi's government had won the elections on a pro-poor platform but was now

"showing all characteristics of its class nature."[20] The other ideas advanced by Tata chimed perfectly with those pushed by bureaucrats and experts advocating a liberalizing turn.

For the featherheads of the ruling party, "socialism" remained a featherbed. Meeting in October 1972, the CWC nicely described the snowballing crisis as "temporary difficulties in the economy." There was "no question of modifying or abridging" the foundational principles of the planned economy to enhance "the scope of operation of private enterprise." On the contrary, the "basic question" was "whether the private sector is conscious of its social responsibility." The latter should "adopt unambiguously criteria imposed by national priorities and discard those of mere profitability."[21] The Congress party remained in the grip of clichés even as the economy writhed under the grip of inflation.

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By early 1973, the problems confronting the Indian economy were enmeshed with global currents and changes: the long slowdown in the advanced industrial economies, and the American exit from the Bretton Woods system, which sent inflation soaring and exchange rates gyrating. Finally, 1972 saw the onset of a cycle of the El Niño Southern Oscillation. This periodic warming of ocean surface temperatures in the eastern Pacific affects the world's climate. In particular, it has consequences for rainfall: weak monsoons in Asia and excessive rains in South America. In 1972–73, it led to a fall in food production in such important producers as Argentina, Peru, and Australia. These effects were amplified by an unrelated geopolitical development: the Nixon administration's 1972 grain deal with the Soviet Union. This agreement led to the rapid depletion of American surplus stocks, so pushing the global prices of food higher.[22]

Each of these global factors told on the Indian economy. In particular, they exacerbated the challenge of managing inflation, which stemmed from monetary expansion and drastic industrial slowdown at home but was now compounded by the global manufacturing slowdown, surging inflation, and exchange rate volatility. The most direct impact was of the El Niño, which coincided with a terrible drought in western and

central India—perhaps the worst since the late nineteenth century.[23] This contributed to an 8 per cent decline in foodgrain and agricultural production in 1972.[24] The twin specters of inflation and food scarcity began to stalk the official imagination as well as the country. The upshot was a ham-fisted attempt at drastic action: the nationalization or government takeover of the wholesale trade in wheat. This episode, too, would end by bolstering the case for lesser regulation of the economy.

The new minister of planning, D.P. Dhar, dusted off an old idea and advocated complete government takeover of trade in essential commodities. The economists in government, particularly P.N. Dhar, "vigorously opposed" this grandiose project. Haksar agreed with them. Even such ardent proponents of nationalization as Kumaramangalam counselled against it, if only "to prevent the emergence of a rival nationalizer."[25] But D.P. Dhar managed to distill his subtle wisdom into the prime minister's ear.

In October 1972, the CWC drafted a resolution expressing "grave concern" at the spike in prices and calling on the government to take "immediate steps . . . to arrest and reverse the upward trend." The resolution sought a "public distribution system" that would cover "essential commodities of mass consumption," including wheat and rice, sugar and edible oils, kerosene and standard cloth. Such a distribution system, it averred, could be successful "only if Government has control over wholesale trade" in these commodities. Such a takeover through "monopoly procurement" should be "dovetailed into an effective system of retail distribution, holding of buffer stocks and appropriate price policy."[26]

The AICC adopted this resolution in its Gandhinagar session in October 1972. The Congress leadership knew full well that there would be stiff opposition from traders and merchants. The All India Food Dealers Association had already circulated a pamphlet pleading against such a move. A group of big grain traders in Calcutta threatened to stop imports of foodgrain into the state. The chief minister of West Bengal, Siddhartha Shankar Ray, bragged at the session that he had responded by arresting 4,100 "profiteers and blackmarketeers [*sic*]," warning traders for good measure that "this was not the way to behave."[27] Since agriculture fell under the purview of the state governments, Indira

Gandhi knew that she needed the cooperation of the state Congress units as well as the rank and file to pull off this ambitious venture. The Congress governments in Haryana and Rajasthan were quick off the blocks to implement the idea. Other Congress chief ministers tried to follow suit. It soon transpired that this ingenious idea was devilishly difficult to implement.

The ministry of agriculture, rather like Stevenson's donkey, was so overburdened that it could scarcely move. In mid-January 1973, the government constituted a committee to frame—within a fortnight—proposals that the states could adopt. The shotgun plan that emerged from this process aimed at effective state procurement and control of the marketed surplus, so eliminating speculation and the ensuing distortions of price and availability. The policy made an implicit distinction between "marketed" and "marketable" surplus. By focusing on the former—what the farmers were willing to sell—the policy practically created incentives for the bigger farmers to hoard part of their produce. This tore a gaping hole in the fabric of the plan from its conception. Further, the plan imposed a countrywide ban on private wholesale trade in wheat, but not on private traders altogether. Licensed private retailers were allowed to operate alongside public fair-price shops and consumer cooperatives. Again, this prompted many wholesalers to reincarnate themselves as retailers and vitiate the workings of the plan.[28]

Both these provisions reflected the reality that the Indian state was incapable of coercing farmers to hand over the "marketable" surplus and that the Congress party was loath to alienate the traders. The plan also cordoned off states from one another and decreed that all interstate movement of wheat would be undertaken by the Food Corporation of India. This rendered slow and cumbersome the movement of wheat between surplus and deficit regions. In so doing, the plan considerably aggravated the problems of the latter. It was, in a word, disastrous.

The policy predictably drew howls of outrage and criticism from the wheat traders, who organized protests and strikes demanding a rollback. In north India, these trading communities were the stronghold of the Jana Sangh. Their agitation shored up the sagging morale of the party, which soon came out swinging against the government. In the three major wheat-producing states of Punjab, Haryana, and (western)

Uttar Pradesh, the big farmers were powerful enough to crimp the procurement efforts, to corrupt local officials, and to organize politically against the state governments. Charan Singh was, of course, the stalwart leader who voiced their demands. Associations of private business and commerce also criticized the policy and asked the government to consider alternatives to nationalization.

The prime minister refused to countenance such requests for months, even as the plan was deliquescing. The government had aimed at procuring 8 million tonnes in 1973, but its reach vastly exceeded its grasp: it secured only 4.6 million tonnes. In the harvest season of 1974, procurement dived by another 40 per cent, yielding just 1.9 million tonnes. Having taken over the trade, the government now bore the sole responsibility for ensuring that wheat was available to every holder of a ration card. Unsurprisingly, this shortfall prompted the government to import 2 million tonnes of wheat in 1973 and 4 million tonnes in 1974–75. The failing policy also fractured the Congress party units in north Indian states, forcing this complaisant crop of chief ministers to execute a gradual retreat and mutter their dissent to the top leadership.

A working group overseen by D.P. Dhar recommended continuing the nationalization of trade in Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh, while restoring free trade in wheat elsewhere. Eventually, in early April 1974, the prime minister decided to abandon nationalization. The retreat was packaged as an advance. Thus, she told Congress workers in Andhra Pradesh that her government did not stand by "any dogma but by the needs of the people": "grain must reach the people at reasonable prices and it does not matter who supplies the food-grains."[29] Explaining this volte-face to the CWC, D.P. Dhar conceded that the procurement trends were "discouraging" and that the outlook was "most uncertain." Even while modifying the policy, the government was committed to building a massive public distribution system over the next five years.[30]

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The food crisis was closely linked to the global shock that sent the price of oil skyrocketing. For food production was increasingly reliant on fertilizers, which required petroleum, as well as tubewells, which needed

diesel or electricity.[31] Indeed, the oil shock underscored India's energy insecurity. The bedrock of India's energy production was coal: the most abundant source of fuel in India. The Fuel Policy Committee appointed in October 1970 submitted its report four years later at the height of the crisis. The committee emphatically stated that coal must be "*the primary source of energy in the country for the next few decades and the energy policy of the country has to be designed on this basic premise.*"[32]

The government was already operating on this premise. As minister of steel, Kumaramangalam was a strong votary of the nationalization of the coking coal industry: coking coal being essential for preparation of the metallurgical-grade coke required for extraction of iron ore. The reserves in India of prime coking coal were estimated at 4,600 million tonnes, which would likely be exhausted within five decades. Private mine owners operated wastefully using old technology and refrained from investing for upgradation. The government's attempts to compel the smaller units to amalgamate had fallen through. In consequence, New Delhi decided in October 1971 to take over coking coal mines for "public management."[33] The owners of these minefields were an obstreperous lot, who deployed local muscle and influence to subvert this soft takeover.[34]

Within a year, the government nationalized these mines. Meanwhile, an interim report of the fuel committee argued that the overall production of coal must be "stepped up from the level of 74 million tonnes in 1970–71 to around 165 million tonnes in 1978–79."[35] This implied almost doubling the production of non-coking coal from 55 million tonnes to 105 million tonnes. In March 1973, the government decided to nationalize the entire coal industry.

Petroleum was a graver problem, owing to inadequate production of crude oil from indigenous sources. India spent a hefty portion of its foreign exchange on importing petroleum for domestic use. Even before the oil shocks, the government was concerned about this degree of external dependence. The prime minister was sent a memo stating that "the problems are very serious . . . [but] there is no serious attempt to tackle them." The core problem was that "production of crude from indigenous sources has not gone beyond seven million tonnes per annum." The oil companies were reluctant to invest in exploration. This

was true not just of the main public sector enterprise, the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation, but also of the foreign firms that operated refinery agreements with the government: Burmah Shell, Esso, and Caltex.[36]

The foreign players, the petroleum ministry noted, had no incentive to invest in exploration, for the agreements allowed them to import crude oil from their own sources, including at prices higher than those of the world market. The ministry estimated that they had raked in up to $100 million over the past dozen years. Since the crude prices had gone up after OPEC's Tehran agreement in February 1971, these companies had passed on the entire increase to the Indian consumer. "The oil companies' attitude is now quite clear," the ministry observed, "that they should exploit every opportunity to raise the price of crude and improve their profitability." They had done just that in July 1971 during the Bangladesh crisis. The sharp increase in crude prices over the past year were "putting on us a great burden of foreign exchange outgo." But the companies had "stoutly turned their face against any reduction in crude prices."[37]

Although the ministers advised nationalizing these companies without any delay, Indira Gandhi was more tentative, owing to the possible repercussions on relations with the United States and Britain. After the oil shocks wracked the Indian economy, she decided to press ahead. All three companies were nationalized between 1974 and 1976.

New Delhi's main concern was, of course, the torrential outflow of foreign exchange. Where it had spent $625 million on oil imports in 1973–74, it was expecting to pay $1.3 billion in 1974–75. The rapidly worsening balance of payments was owing to the conjunction of multiple problems: mounting inflation, depleting levels of foodgrain stocks, a steep spike in oil prices, and heavier debt servicing. As early as June 1973, officials in the finance ministry had sounded out India's executive director at the IMF to probe the possibility of borrowing SDR (Special Drawing Rights) 100 million from the fund to pay for food imports.[38] In the event, the government decided to bide its time. Not least because such a move would confute the claim in the parliament that exports were on the rise.

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By the spring of 1974, the external problem of payments deficit and the internal problem of surging inflation coincided in a perfect storm. The concurrent fiasco of wheat nationalization at once concentrated the prime minister's mind and led her towards economists and advisors urging a dose of orthodoxy. In hindsight, this was the moment when Indira Gandhi turned her back on the "socialist" economic phase and began shuffling towards the center. None of this was done with any intellectual conviction, yet the quest for macroeconomic stability pointed in the direction of loosening the state's asphyxiating grip on the economy.

The government's thinking at this juncture was influenced by a short book, *Inflation and the Economic Crisis*, published by the veteran economist V.K.R.V. Rao and his colleagues at the Institute of Economic Growth.[39] They attributed the galloping inflation to a sharp increase in money supply, along with stagnant industrial output and a shortfall in food production owing to the drought. They advocated a credit squeeze and wage freezes to force down inflation. They further recommended increased exports and stronger imports, as well as a liberalization of the industrial licensing regime and repeal of wheat nationalization. All these not only fit well with the IMF's requirements but were endorsed by their former colleague and secretary to the prime minister, P.N. Dhar.

In April, New Delhi formally asked the IMF for assistance. The $925 million financed largely from the fund's low-conditionality facilities helped stabilize the current account of the balance of payments. As a consequence of this experience, the Indian government began from 1975 to strengthen its balance of payments position and foreign exchange reserves. From 1976–77 to 1978–79, India's foreign exchange reserves increased by more than $5 billion.[40]

The turn to the IMF was complemented by a strong anti-inflation stance at home. In July 1974, Indira Gandhi introduced an extremely tough package of anti-inflationary policies—fiscal, monetary, and income-policy measures—by means of a supplementary budget and by ordinances. These included the compulsory deposit of the whole of additional wages and salaries and half of additional dearness allowance for all public and private sector employees—funds that would be frozen

with the RBI and paid out with interest in five annual instalments after the policy ended; another compulsory deposit scheme for all taxpayers with annual income above Rs. 15,000; restrictions on dividends payable and profit-sharing by companies; and 7 per cent tax on gross interest earned by scheduled banks on loans and advances.[41] Many of her senior colleagues and left-leaning advisors warned her that these measures would be politically unpopular. But she fully backed her team of liberal economic advisors and officials, led by Manmohan Singh (later prime minister of India).[42]

The RBI followed suit by hiking the bank rate from 7 per cent to 9 per cent, as well as sizably increasing the interest on bank accounts to enable greater inflow of deposits. The bank's policy roused the ire of influential ministers, including T.A. Pai, who was looking after industry. But the finance ministry insisted that the RBI be allowed to act as it deemed fit.[43] By the end of 1974, inflation began to taper. Looking back at this intense crisis, the policy planning group in the foreign ministry would note that India had been among "the worst sufferers" of the oil shock, having experienced "a nil-rate of growth in India in 1974–75 with the consequence that per capita income actually declined. The prospect is that for the next few years, there is likely to be an actual decline in the already 'marginal' income of millions of people."[44]

In these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that organized labor turned unprecedentedly militant. As the Indian economy entered a period of low growth and high inflation in the early 1970s, labor disputes escalated—especially over the question of indexation of wages to prevent inflation from eroding their purchasing power. In 1972 and 1973, there were 20.5 million man-days lost. As inflation peaked in 1974, the number leapt to 40.3 million. In the industrial heartland of Bombay and its environs, the number of strikes went up from 160 in 1965–69 to 211 in 1970–74.[45]

Notwithstanding her avowals of "socialism," the prime minister had long taken a dim view of organized labor's militancy. When central government employees had gone on strike in September 1968, demanding improvement in wages and working conditions, her government had come down heavily. The central paramilitary forces had been deployed to suppress the strike with lethal force, leaving seventeen

dead. Furthermore, 12,000 employees and union leaders had been incarcerated, 40,000 suspended, and 64,000 issued termination notices.

When the opposition had moved a no-confidence motion in parliament, Indira Gandhi had argued that it would not be equitable for the government "to discriminate in favour of a small and relatively better off section" of the population. "Are there not hundreds of millions of . . . landless labourers, unemployed artisans, struggling farmers," she rhetorically asked, "who in all conscience have a stronger claim on society?"[46] This perception of organized labor as a privileged layer of the working class ran deeper with time.

Addressing a labor conference in May 1971, the prime minister had said she wished to speak frankly. Over the past three years, she had been "deeply anxious" about the deterioration in industrial relations. It was understandable that labor equated "its own sectional interest with those of the whole." Strong trade unions helped the struggle for the interests of labor. "But who is to look after the interests of the vast masses of unorganized and voiceless?" The country needed "industrial harmony," she had insisted, "for the sake of the poorer masses who suffer an erosion of their low living standards . . . the unemployed whose only hope lies in a higher rate of capital formation and investment, whether in the public or the private sector." Organized labor's demands for higher wages and benefits were understandable, but they had to be pursued "with due regard to the general state of the economy and the interests of the unemployed."[47]

Unsurprisingly, when Indira Gandhi met trade union leaders for a discussion in September 1972, she was considerably sharper. The government had promised labor a "fair deal." But resources could not be "increased merely by printing more money." Already the economy had reached a point where "more money is chasing less goods. The result is inflation." If production further slowed down owing to industrial disputes, then unemployment would rise. "The trade union leaders should see," she claimed, "that they are objectively becoming anti-employment" and hence against the government's attempts to ameliorate poverty.[48] These points were drafted by P.N. Dhar, but their perception of organized labor was identical. As he summarized their approach, "within the labouring class, favour the unemployed and underemployed as against the labour aristocracy."[49]

The Indira Gandhi government's antipathy to organized labor turned apoplectic when the labor unions of the Indian railways called for a strike in April 1974. The railway was the largest employer in the country. With some 1.4 million on its rolls, it accounted for 7 per cent of the formal workforce and 10 per cent of the public sector. The railways were also the logistical heart of the Indian economy. The unprecedented national railway strike rose from a concatenation of causes and circumstances.[50] For a start, the railway workers were dismayed at the erosion of their purchasing power since 1972, both in absolute terms and relative to some public sector employees. Then there was the high-handed style of management and its disciplinary procedures, which dated back to the colonial period. For a third, there were technical and social changes—including the "Indianization" of the running staff, previously dominated by Anglo-Indians—that impinged on the status of workers. Further, there was a sprouting of "category unions"—of running staff, stationmasters, and so on—that began to challenge the standing of the two national unions, All India Railwaymen's Federation (AIRF), affiliated to the Socialist Party, and the National Federation of Indian Railwaymen, dominated by the Congress. Finally, there was the global context of 1973–74, when every major industrial economy witnessed a wave of strikes.

In November 1973, the Socialist politician George Fernandes took over as leader of the AIRF. A tough, indefatigable, and charismatic leader with long experience of both trade unions and politics, Fernandes sensed an opportunity to cap the knees of the government. As the crisis deepened, Fernandes galvanized the massive and dispersed railway workers and unions to form a national coordination committee. The latter formulated a charter of demands, including immediate parity in wages with the highest-paid public sector enterprises; a bonus of a month's wages for the past two years; and permanent employment contracts for all casual workers, with retrospective benefits. The railways estimated that all this would cost Rs. 4.5 billion—well beyond its parlous finances and the government's runaway deficits.[51] More importantly, a strike could bring the entire economy to a sudden stop. As Fernandes told the railwaymen, "Seven days' strike of the Indian Railways will cause every thermal station in the country to close down.

A ten days' strike of the Indian Railways—every steel mill in India would close down and the industries in the country will come to a halt for the next twelve months. A fifteen day strike in the Indian Railways—the country will starve."[52]

For all his militancy, Fernandes repeatedly urged Indira Gandhi and her railway minister, L.N. Mishra, to settle the economic demands of the workers and avert the strike announced from 8 May 1974. The government's response was brutal. It invoked the Defence of India Rules—still prevalent under the 1971 war emergency—and preemptively arrested all the leaders and thousands of workers under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act. The territorial army was mobilized to secure the tracks and lines, while basic passenger and essential services were operated with the help of the army and other security forces. After twenty days of repression, the railway workers called off the strike.

The economic crisis of 1973–74 had curdled the hopes of renewal that had accompanied Indira Gandhi's mammoth political victories in 1971–72. Her dominance over the cabinet, the party, the parliament, and the courts appeared unassailable. While the railway strike was underway, the prime minister even burnished her Caesarist credentials by testing a nuclear device to rapturous applause. At the hustings, too, her party remained formidable—as the elections in Uttar Pradesh had shown only months earlier. Yet at the height of the economic crisis she relied on massive coercion rather than persuasion or popular appeal. The railway strikers, it turned out, were canaries in the mineshaft of Indian democracy.

6

HIGH NOON

The ferocious breaking of the national railway strike and the anti-inflation package of 1974 underscored the untrammeled dominance of executive power. In both instances, Indira Gandhi had acted via ordinances and used extraordinary powers. It was the domestic counterpart to her decisive use of force against Pakistan in 1971: both labor and inflation were brought to heel. The prime minister's ability to take such action was touted as yet another affirmation of her exceptional qualities of leadership. In fact, they reflected a dramatic shift in relative institutional power.

By splitting the party in 1969, Indira Gandhi had played *va banque* and reconfigured the relationship between the prime minister and the party leadership. But it was the massive mandate of 1971 that entirely subordinated the parliamentary party and the cabinet to her. As Haksar had observed, they now owed their political fortunes to her charismatic leadership. The victory in Bangladesh followed by the sweeping win in the state elections ensured that every Congress chief minister held office at her sufferance. The prime minister's dominance over the party and the parliament was complete.

The political opposition now seemed a blasted heath. After the electoral debacle of 1971, the Grand Alliance of opposition parties had rapidly unraveled. Each of its major constituents had blamed the alliance for their abysmal showing. However, their decision to go alone in the state assembly elections of 1972 had also failed to arrest their decline. The Jana Sangh had campaigned on the slogan that it was the

"Only Alternative." The outcome had been the loss of majority in its home turf of Delhi, considerable ceding of ground to the Congress in the Hindi heartland, including its traditional stronghold of Madhya Pradesh, as well as complete loss of representation in key states such as Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Punjab. Ahead of these elections, the two socialist parties had formally merged—though they found it difficult to jettison narcissism of small differences, personal rivalries, and petty intrigues. The new Socialist Party had tested its strategy of fighting alone in its fortress of Bihar. The result was an unmitigated disaster. The Socialists polled a little over 16 per cent of the votes, but secured a mere thirty-three seats. The victorious Congress (R)'s junior ally in the state, the Communist Party of India, took thirty-five.

Only in Orissa had the opposition held its own against the electoral tsunami of Indira Gandhi. The assembly elections had been concurrent with the general elections of March 1971. A coalition government of the Swatantra Party and the Utkal Congress of Biju Patnaik had been formed under the chief ministership of the veteran Orissa politician Biswanath Das. But this united front had lasted barely fifteen months. Patnaik's principal lieutenants had defected to the Congress, which then formed a government led by Indira Gandhi's protégé Nandini Satpathy. Subsequent attempts by the socialists, including their old warhorse J.B. Kripalani, to foster meaningful unity amongst opposition parties came to naught. Mired in the slough of division and despondency, they turned to another leader of yore: Jayaprakash Narayan.

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Known to the country as "JP," Jayaprakash Narayan had as a teenaged student plunged into Mahatma Gandhi's non-cooperation movement of 1919. He spent much of the subsequent decade studying and working in the United States, where, interestingly he also picked up his Marxism. On returning to India, he became a prominent member of the Congress Socialist Party—a leftish ginger group within the Indian National Congress—and also drew close to Jawaharlal Nehru. During the Quit India movement of 1942, Narayan went underground to organize a resistance—a move that may have been practically ineffectual but catapulted him politically to national fame. Soon after independence,

Narayan left the Congress with his associates, including Narendra Deva and Ram Manohar Lohia, to found the Socialist Party. Although he threw himself into building the party as a national alternative to the Congress, Narayan lacked the will to power of a machine politician. The Socialists' poor showing in the first general elections of 1952 led at once to his disenchantment with parliamentary politics and a gradual but steady withdrawal from the affairs of the Socialist Party.

Thereafter, Narayan cast about for an alternative to parliamentary democracy, declining to shake the feline paw that Nehru held out to him. Soon, he lit upon the "*Bhoodan*" movement inaugurated by Vinoba Bhave, a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi's. Bhave sought to persuade the grandees of rural north India to part with some of their land, which could then be distributed to the rural poor. Having rightly assessed the Congress's squeamishness on land reforms and having rejected the Communists' alternative of an agrarian revolution, Narayan regarded Bhave's movement as the best vehicle for a peaceful transformation of power relations in rural India. He gave it the better part of two decades before conceding the futility of philanthropic appeals. During these years, though, Narayan emerged as a powerful moral presence, advocating the cause of the Kashmiris, the Nagas, and the Tibetans, among other subjugated groups. Owing to this reputation, Indira Gandhi had roped him in to rouse world opinion during the Bangladesh crisis.

Jayaprakash Narayan had had a close and tangled relationship with Jawaharlal Nehru, whom he always referred to as "*Bhai*" (brother). Their wives, Prabhavati Narayan and Kamala Nehru, had shared an even deeper bond of friendship. Yet Narayan had never struck a rapport with Indira Gandhi. His exchanges with her were often awkward and edgy, carrying more than a whiff of patronization towards a younger woman. Indira Gandhi, for her part, felt that Narayan had let down her father by refusing to return to the Congress and bolstering the party's left-of-center wing. Besides, she had nothing but contempt for his brand of moralpolitik. Politics for Narayan, she observed, was the art of the impossible. Brittle to begin with, their relationship came steadily under strain in the years of her ascendancy.

Soon after her massive electoral victory in March 1971, Narayan sent a note of congratulation to "Indu." This wasn't a win for the

Congress party, he wrote, but "a victory which is yours alone." Having hailed this "unprecedented incident in the democratic history of India," Narayan sounded a note of caution on the "immense and complex" challenges confronting the country. Finally, in a candid if condescending vein, he wrote: "I must say I did not like your political conduct during the Presidential election although I knew it was a moment of political life or death for you. Now that you have earned for yourself unparalleled power, I pray to God to bestow you with good health, long life, energy and a sense of fairness and justice."[1]

Indira Gandhi was stung. "I am saddened on reading these lines," she replied: "In particular, it has hurt me that you know and understand me so little." Drawing on her ample reserves of sanctimony, she added, "I have never worried about my political being or any other sense of self . . . it was not about my future but about the future of the Congress, future of the country." Narayan was not habituated to conceding the moral high ground. "Indu, it is correct that I hardly know you," he replied, "almost none at all—as a politician." He had only known her in "a personal sense with personal affection." "However, Indu," he continued, "I too have long experience in politics and I have been analysing the scene—even after formally giving up politics—in a neutral, objective manner." Having witnessed splits in parties up close, he was aware that these had "an ideological and policy component . . . but this was not the sole reason for the break-up of the Old Congress." At any rate, even though he had disliked her political behavior, he had "never spoken against you in public."[2]

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As Indira Gandhi's second term in office unfolded, Narayan found it difficult to exercise such restraint. When the state elections held in West Bengal in March 1972 elicited vigorous accusations of rigging from the Communist Party of India (Marxist), he felt that India's electoral democracy had sunk to unplumbed depths. No friend of the communists, Narayan wrote to the new chief minister and trusted ally of Indira Gandhi, Siddhartha Shankar Ray, suggesting the appointment of a special commission to inquire into these allegations. He sent a copy of the letter to the prime minister. Indira Gandhi desisted from responding but asked Haksar

to help draft Ray's reply. In his letter, Ray testily noted that Narayan seemed to have forgotten the violence unleashed by the Naxalite movement and its sympathizers. The outcome of the election, he claimed, reflected "a vast upsurge of public feeling" against the prevailing state of violence and intimidation. "To resort to extra-constitutional methods of investigating the fantastic charges of rigging," Ray wrote, "is, to my mind, bringing grist to the mill of those who have no use for democratic processes."[3]

Narayan now decided to go public. In a short essay published in August 1972 on the twenty-fifth anniversary of India's independence, he observed that Indian democracy had survived thus far owing to three factors: the nonviolent methods of popular resistance devised by Mahatma Gandhi; the transformation under his leadership of the Indian National Congress into a mass organization; and, above all, the "standards of public conduct and democratic values" that had been established during the course of the national movement. All three, he averred, had steadily declined since independence. The Congress had ceased to be a mass movement and instead morphed into an electoral machine. Even so, it had retained its democratic character and mass organizational structure. "All that has radically changed in the past two or three years." Despite its resounding electoral victories in 1971–72, the party was now "little more than a hollow shell." There was "little or no internal democracy left in it," nor any "inner strength and substance." Rather, the Congress was fueled by "huge doses of funds and the charisma of its leader." This state of affairs, he warned, "might suit Indiraji's style of leadership, but it spells ruin for the Congress as a democratic organization and *ipso facto* for Indian democracy itself."[4]

Similarly, there had been a steady erosion in the standards of public conduct, but latterly there had been "a precipitous fall." Narayan was particularly perturbed by "huge election expenditures" and physical rigging of polls—practices that threatened to reduce elections to mere formality. In closing, he warned that "the consequences of cold machiavellism for a backward society, lacking the infrastructure of democracy and the countervailing powers of a developed society, can only be disastrous for India's democracy."

Writing to the prime minister three days later, Narayan suggested that the issues flagged by him could be considered by a conclave of

political parties and public figures. Indira Gandhi was cut to the quick. "I have serious misgivings," she replied, "about the efficacy" of his proposal. Narayan assumed that various political parties would adopt "an attitude of calm objectivity merely because they will meet together in response to your invitation." On the contrary, given the nature of "all the allegations which have been made about rigging elections," the meeting would end up putting her party in the dock and apportioning blame. The points that he raised merited discussion—but in a setting of "calm and academic detachment."[5]

Narayan went ahead and convened a meeting of "Committed Democrats" the following month in Delhi. At this point he had in mind no party-political program. Rather, he held that "the real remedy lies in developing a strong and independent public opinion which will have to be heeded by those in power." Towards this end, he proposed the formation of an association, which, if well developed, could "aid the election to legislative bodies of persons of intellectual integrity and moral excellence through non-party voters' councils formed in select constituencies."[6]

As Narayan stirred out of his self-imposed political exile, some figures in the opposition looked to him for a lead. Socialists apart, he commanded the respect of many politicians of different hues who had come of age in the final decade of the freedom movement. Although the opposition recognized the need to stand united against the Congress juggernaut, it was unclear what form such unity should take. Charan Singh, who had emerged as a pivotal player, felt that all political parties opposed to the Congress—barring the Communists—ought to amalgamate into a single national opposition party. Neither the Jana Sangh nor the Socialists were enthusiastic about the idea. Ideological qualms aside, Charan Singh's party had already bitten off a chunk of their electoral bases since 1967.

Biju Patnaik, the senior leader from Orissa, met Narayan in February 1973, apprising him of the efforts at uniting the opposition and suggesting that he helm their endeavor. Narayan issued a public statement that he had "no desire" to return to party politics. Nor was he sanguine about the opposition parties. "It seems impossible," he said, "that the scattered political fragments of the Opposition, with their

fierce controversies, their widely differing and often contradictory ideologies, the personal ambitions and interests of its leaders, can be bound together in any viable manner." That said, in the interest of India's democracy, he was ready "to lend my moral support and be available for consultation and advice."[7]

Indira Gandhi's mauling of the judiciary by superseding the senior judges of the supreme court galvanized Narayan. In a press statement, Narayan said that he was "deeply distressed and worried." Pursuing socialism at the expense of fundamental rights was "a slippery path and will end up not in democratic socialism but in dictatorial Communism." He did not suggest that there was "an immediate danger of all this happening." Rather he was "merely pointing out the logic of unlimited power." He also emphasized the need to preserve the judiciary's independence: "all that has been said by the Prime Minister and her colleagues to justify their action is utterly unconvincing. Much of it is also misleading . . . unless the independence of the judiciary is *credibly* assured, the very foundations of our democracy will be in danger of being totally destroyed."[8]

The prime minister replied that Narayan's "dismal conclusions" were unwarranted. "There is no question here," she insisted, "of the executive subordinating the judiciary." The courts had been inconsistent and illiberal. Narayan, she insinuated, was aiding her adversaries: "Democracy, independence of the judiciary and fundamental rights are not in danger. They would be threatened if we were to allow our faith to be eclipsed by defeatism and if we help alliances of the extreme right and left." Narayan replied that this non sequitur overlooked the simple point that if the appointment of the chief justice was controlled by the prime minister, the judiciary could not be independent. "If your letter is a considered response . . . I can only confess to a sense of utter disappointment and deep distress."[9]

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In the wake of these contretemps, Narayan resolved to press ahead with his quest for strong and independent public opinion. In July 1973, he launched a weekly magazine *Everyman's* and roped in the noted writer S.H. Vatsyayan "Agyeya" as its editor.[10] In his opening piece for the

publication, Narayan laid out his diagnosis of "the root cause" of Indian democracy's precarious health: "the precipitous fall in moral standards of our public life." This might admittedly strike his readers as too idealistic and removed from the practical problems confronting the country. But this was precisely "the core of our national problem: We have become so cynical . . . that nothing seems to outrage our conscience . . . or stir us to action." Politics was not for saints, nor did he pretend to sainthood. But democratic politics "must know the limits it may not cross . . . I believe the permissible limits have already been crossed in this country."[11]

In subsequent essays, Narayan argued that corruption was the many-headed Hydra that assailed Indian democracy. The masses were right in believing that "most, if not all, ministers including chief ministers; most of their representatives . . . most if not all officers of government, high or low, have become corrupt – the corruption taking varied forms." The nub of the problem was the "complete collapse of the moral authority of the country's political leadership"—including the prime minister, whose "own image has become clouded." Even if the diagnosis was vague, Narayan believed that remedies were at hand: introducing legislation to empower the Central Vigilance Commission and enacting the "Lok Pal" bill for an anti-corruption watchdog armed with wide statutory powers—legislation that had been languishing in parliament for years.[12]

Narayan held that the largest source of corruption was in political financing. "One hears of fantastic amounts running into tens of crores [hundreds of millions] collected by certain ministers of the Union Cabinet and placed at the disposal of the prime minister." These sums were neither accounted for nor audited. They were used not just for elections but "for 'managing' party members, buying up defectors, and toppling not only Opposition ministries but also Congress ministries in the course of party in-fighting." The demand for such political finance spurred corruption in business firms by encouraging or compelling them to keep unaccounted "black money," and in the bureaucracy by impairing its authority and impartiality. The upshot was that voters themselves were corrupted and grew disillusioned with the democratic process.[13]

Narayan's concern with corruption was not far wrong. There had indeed been a significant change in electoral financing during Indira Gandhi's tenure. In 1969, the parliament had amended the Companies Act and imposed a total ban on corporate donations to political parties. This measure had been aimed at advancing multiple objectives: showcasing Indira Gandhi's progressive credentials; choking off corporate funding to her rivals, especially Congress (O) and the Swatantra Party; and ensuring nevertheless that the gravy train secretly ran to the ruling party. What is more, the prime minister had centralized the collection of funds in her own office, so tightening her grip over the Congress (R). The upshot was the increased circulation of illegal money in the political system, inaugurating an era of "brief case politics."[14]

While Narayan's moral concerns were not misplaced, he couched them in an unwarranted tone of empirical certainty. Madhu Limaye, a younger colleague and admirer, would later concede that the reports cited by Narayan were "grossly exaggerated." The outlay of vast sums of money for campaigns was confined to a few constituencies. And it was far from clear that money had swung these elections. In fact, representatives of leading business houses, K.K. Birla and Naval Tata, had been trounced by "obscure Congress workers." Much the same was true of the princes.[15] In Narayan's reading, however, corruption was an amorphous force in Indian politics—one that operated like the weather: it was everywhere and under no one's control. In time, the sheer vagueness of this charge would help link a diverse set of constituencies and interests under his leadership.

Narayan insisted that his journal would go beyond critique and advance constructive suggestions for popular action. However, his wife's demise and his own ill-health precluded greater participation in the affairs of *Everyman's*. By the end of 1973, Narayan was wondering if he had erred in launching this venture. His own essays had not evoked much of a response, and he was "still thinking about an appropriate form of people's action." His thoughts also turned towards social forces that might give concrete expression to his inchoate ideas. Ironically, he was struck by Indira Gandhi's message to the World Union Parliament of Youth in which she had perceptively said: "a new force has come into being, Youth Power. All over the world young people are restless and engaged in one form of protest or another . . . there is much to be

restless about and to protest." Narayan issued a public statement that "Youth in our country too has much to protest against." Hitherto, they had been engaged in protests in their education institutions—protests that had "suffered from localism and narrow and immediate concerns." He wished to draw their attention to an issue of "even deeper and fundamental importance": the state of Indian democracy. "Surely," he argued, "there cannot be a more important issue which should move youth to action. Time for action is here and now."[16] Narayan had apparently not realized that youth power was already on the scene.

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Students had long been an important, if evanescent, force in Indian political life. Narayan himself had cut his teeth in politics as a student, and the Quit India movement, his moment of fame, had been dominated by students. The youth had similarly participated in the various movements for linguistic reorganization of states that had roiled the republic in the past two decades. Yet student politics began acquiring unprecedented salience and substance from the late 1960s. For one thing, the expansion of higher education drew many more young people to campuses across the country. Political parties sought to leverage this development by sponsoring their own student unions in universities and colleges. For another, the grim economic situation in these years led the youth both to ponder the structural failures that had brought the country to this pass and to worry about their own prospects. Finally, these years witnessed the rise of student movements and revolts across the world, the "global 1968," especially in response to the American war on Vietnam. An Indian government committee noted in 1967 that "there has been in evidence in recent times a spirit of dissatisfaction and frustration among sections of the younger generation. But this has not been confined to India alone, it has found expression in other parts of the world also."[17] In the following years, students in neighboring Pakistan brought down a military dictator and later fought for an independent Bangladesh. Indian students were hardly immune to the radical currents girdling the globe. The Naxalbari revolt in Bengal and the dream of a Maoist revolution drew significant numbers of students to the armed underground movement.

Six years on, youth radicalism spread like a bushfire at the opposite end of the country in Gujarat. This, too, stemmed from a global conjuncture: the great inflation triggered by the oil shock of 1973. In a survey conducted in late December 1973 in the city of Surat, more than 50 per cent of the respondents identified extraordinary price rises and scarcity as the major problems. The latter stemmed in part from a poor harvesting season, which in turn drove up the prices of wheat, millets, and other essential commodities. As a food deficit state, dependent even in good times on imports from other regions, Gujarat found itself in a parlous situation after June 1973. Against the monthly requirement of 100,000 tonnes of wheat, it received only 15,000 tonnes in November and December 1973. Public opinion blamed the scarcity on hoarding and profiteering by shopkeepers. Nearly three-fourths of the respondents felt that living conditions had actually deteriorated. No fewer than 84 per cent felt their children would have to face greater hardships than they had.[18]

Students were already experiencing the knife-edge of inflation. Over three-fourths of undergraduates in Gujarat hailed from middle-to-high-income families. And yet, they found their purchasing power wilting by late 1973. Students on residential campuses saw their monthly bills soaring by almost 50 per cent. Campus protests in the state capital, Ahmedabad, soon turned acrimonious and violent as students vandalized and destroyed infrastructure and targeted senior members of the academic administration. The latter called in the police to restore order on campuses, resulting in further clashes between students and cops. A group of over a thousand students went to the office of the ruling Congress party, demanding the immediate and unconditional release of students detained by the police. As violence escalated, a committee of youth was formed in January 1974 by students from various colleges in the city. Their charter of demands illustrated the manner in which galloping inflation was threading together a range of concerns within and outside campuses. Thus, the students demanded substantial reduction and capping of food bills; waivers in tuition and examination fees; a ban on police entering campuses and using force; the arrest of hoarders and profiteers, as well as distribution of their foodgrain stocks to the people; and the resignation of the education minister for failing in her duties.[19]

The last demand suggested that the students were turning their crosshairs on the state government. Sensing an opportunity, the principal opposition parties in Gujarat—the Jana Sangh and the Congress (O)—sought to leverage the mounting student protests for their own desultory anti-inflation campaigns. Writing some months earlier, Narayan had perceptively observed that opposition parties were increasingly driven to the conclusion that the Congress could never be displaced through elections and hence turned to protests, direct action, and violence.[20] Indeed, over the next year and more, the rules of the game of parliamentary democracy would be disregarded by all political actors—not least Narayan himself.

In early January 1974, the two parties called for a *bandh*, or general shutdown, in several towns. The call elicited a strong public response thanks to students' willingness to enforce it. It also triggered further clashes between the police and protestors. Although the police promulgated a "shoot at sight" order in Ahmedabad, the protesting youth engaged in pitched battles: hurling stones and bottles while braving tear gas and bullets. Presently, violence ripped through other parts of the state, and periodic clashes continued for a couple of months. Official figures recorded eighty-five people killed in police firing.

In the wake of the massive protests and repression, the popular agitation took a decisively political turn. With the support of the Jana Sangh's student wing, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the students formed the Navnirman Yuvak Samiti (Youth Committee for Regeneration). They now called for the resignation of Chief Minister Chiman Patel and the Congress government (which commanded a majority of 140 in a house of 168)—on the grounds that it was irredeemably corrupt. The Samiti sought the closure of universities and colleges until the government stepped down. The chief minister's attempt to persuade the students to enter formal negotiations to resolve their specific problems found no traction. Meanwhile, the students were joined by teacher associations, as well as a battery of prominent intellectuals and artists. Big businesses in this entrepreneurial state took fright at the spiraling violence and appealed to the government to protect traders. But their support could not prop up the tottering government. Soon, cracks began to appear in the Congress party in

Gujarat as the head of the state unit and a few ministers resigned. On 9 February 1974, Patel's government resigned and president's rule was imposed on Gujarat. The president's proclamation, however, placed the assembly under suspension, leaving open the possibility of another Congress government being formed. Having succeeded in forking out Patel's government, the students were not minded to stand down. The Samiti now demanded the dissolution of the state legislative assembly. In the following days, the cycle of agitation and repression acquired considerable momentum, leaving ninety-five dead and nearly a thousand injured.[21]

The opposition parties forcefully seconded the students' demand to dissolve the state legislature. Elections held that month in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Orissa had further underscored their continuing and debilitating inability to take on Indira Gandhi's Congress at the hustings. Uttar Pradesh proved a particularly sore trial. In May 1973, the Congress government in the state had been stunned by the mutiny of the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) units deployed in Kanpur, Varanasi, and capital city Lucknow. The revolt had stemmed from simmering disgruntlement in the PAC's ranks over conditions of service and the apathetic attitude of successive governments. Owing to the gravity of the situation, the army had been called out to quell the uprising.[22] Thereafter, Indira Gandhi had replaced Chief Minister Kamalapati Tripathi with H.N. Bahuguna.[23] When state assembly elections were called, the principal opposition parties—the Jana Sangh, Congress (O), the Socialist Party, and Charan Singh's Bharatiya Kranti Dal (BKD) (now including the rump of Swatantra)—decided to go it alone. Only in some constituencies did they agree not to contest against each other. In the event, the tarnished incumbent, the Congress (R), took 32.29 per cent of the votes and ended with 215 seats of 424. The BKD and its minor allies had a vote share of 21.22 per cent but finished with 106 seats. In fact, the parties comprising the former "Grand Alliance" had polled almost 50 per cent of the vote. Evidently, opposition unity was indispensable but also insufficient to dislodge Indira Gandhi's Congress.

In a flailing bid to revive their political fortunes, the Jana Sangh and Congress (O) hunkered down on the demand to dissolve the Gujarat

assembly. On 11 March 1974, Morarji Desai—the senior Congress (O) leader from Gujarat—announced an indefinite fast in pursuance of the demand. Fearful of the consequences of this fast, the union government dissolved the assembly on 15 March. Riding a wave of youth power, the old guard had finally landed a punch on Indira Gandhi.

The extraordinary developments in Gujarat struck a resonant chord among students in the eastern state of Bihar. A predominantly agrarian state riven by deep inequalities of landholding and caste, Bihar had barely recovered from the famine of 1967 when drought and rampant inflation struck in quick and ferocious succession. By late 1973, towns and cities were reeling under the pressure of mounting prices and scarcity of food and consumable goods. In a remarkably obtuse move, the Congress government in the state imposed a professional tax on anyone with a monthly income of Rs. 300—a measure that hit both the professional and working classes. Bihar had long been a stronghold of the Socialists and the Communist Party of India. Lately, the Maoist "Naxalite" movement had also made inroads. The left parties and labor unions formed a committee and began organizing protests against high prices, scarcity, and the professional tax. Their call for a statewide *bandh* on 21 January 1974 garnered the support of some 400 trade unions.

By this time, the student agitation in Bihar was gathering momentum. College and university campuses in Bihar had a history of political agitation going back to the national movement. They were also known for intense political and caste rivalry among student groups. As in Gujarat, however, the economic crisis shaped their immediate demands. Students protested against rising expenses and sought reduction in tuition fees; they also demanded concessions in cinema tickets. These strikes and demonstrations escalated owing to rivalry among student outfits. Unlike in Gujarat, student politics in Bihar were organized and competitive, with prominent groups owing allegiance to political parties. The ABVP, student affiliate of the right-wing Jana Sangh, refused to join the anti-inflation protests organized by the left parties and supported by their student federation. The ABVP sought instead to launch a statewide agitation in conjunction with the Samajwadi Yuvajana Sabha, the student front of the Socialist Party, and the Tarun Shanti Sena, affiliated to the Sarvodaya movement with which Jayaprakash Narayan had long

been associated. Even as student protests kicked off and turned violent, the Patna University Students' Union (the largest in the state) attempted in mid-February 1974 to create a united front for an agitation on the pattern of Gujarat. The failure of this effort led to the formation of the Chhatra Sangharsh Samiti (CSS), comprising the ABVP and other non-communist groups. The leftist students organized their own front.[24]

Both the student fronts, especially the CSS, swiftly established their presence in various campuses across the state. Given their competing calls for boycotts, protests, and demonstrations, universities in Bihar ground to a halt. Matters came to a head on 18 March 1974 when the CSS organized a *gherao*, or blockade, of the state assembly in Patna to prevent the governor from addressing a joint session of the legislature. The leadership of the CSS, including Laloo Prasad Yadav (later chief minister of Bihar),[25] insisted that their action was aimed at inflation, unemployment, and corruption and that political parties would not be allowed to join in. In the event, there was a serious clash with the police. In the ensuing melee, some groups of students went on a rampage, setting alight government buildings and newspaper offices, and raiding hotels and government food storages. The following day, riots were touched off in a dozen cities and towns across the state. The government responded by imposing curfews and calling in the army to assist the police: over twenty people died in police firing, and hundreds were arrested.

In the last week of March 1974, the CSS called for a statewide shutdown. The students now trained their sights on the ruling political dispensation, demanding the resignation of the Congress ministry led by Chief Minister Abdul Ghafoor and the dissolution of the Bihar assembly. Student leaders were already scanning the landscape for a charismatic figurehead for their movement. The ABVP, in particular, hoped that Jayaprakash Narayan would guide their efforts. Speaking to students at meetings organized by the ABVP, Narayan had exhorted them to forsake education for a year and work to save Indian democracy. At this point, Narayan was still hopeful of bringing together all political parties to address the problem of corruption. In early March, he wrote to Indira Gandhi that Jana Sangh's Atal Behari Vajpayee was ready to work with her towards these ends. He had also spoken to the Socialists

about "how the opposition can cooperate with the Prime Minister in this hour of need."[26] The dissolution of the Gujarat assembly and the clashes in Bihar led Narayan to reconsider his stance.

On 16 March, he gave a press statement congratulating the students of Gujarat. "Any sensible government" would have responded much earlier, for "there never was any doubt" that the people of Gujarat wanted the assembly dissolved. Narayan also criticized the prime minister for "mishandling people's agitation and misreading their mind."[27] Narayan would later write that he had been:

> groping to find a way out . . . I wasted two years trying to bring about a politics of consensus . . . I also spent quite some time with the opposition parties to prevent the splitting of votes . . . I came to the conclusion that the people must become their own saviours . . . How to activise the people was the problem. Then I saw students in Gujarat bring about a big political change with the backing of the people . . . and I knew this was the way out.[28]

So, constitutional and democratic norms and procedures ought to give way to popular mobilization and demands that claimed the people's sanction.

Speaking on the clashes in Patna, Narayan expressed his deep anguish that students who had done "their best to adhere to peaceful methods" had been so brutally repressed. "In any democratic country," he declared, "after such a monumental failure of administration . . . the government would have resigned." He advised the chief minister to resign, "whatever the [Congress] High Command may say." Narayan was unsure that a Gujarat-style agitation could work in Bihar. The people of the state were habituated to oppression under the feudal agrarian order. What is more, the students were "hopelessly divided" and did not have the "moral qualities of those in Gujarat."[29] Be that as it may, when the students approached him, he agreed to lead them provided they eschewed violence and partisanship. He also advised them "not to be rash and not to try to imitate Gujarat." The government, for its part, was determined to quell the protests. In the town of Gaya, when students and their supporters sought to picket government offices and

courts, the police opened fire, leaving three dead and over twenty seriously injured. An official inquiry quickly absolved the police of any excesses. Narayan's gorge rose at this flagrant brandishing of state power. "This was the last straw on my back," he wrote: "my mind was made up from that moment that the Bihar Legislative Assembly which has upheld the corruption and inefficiency and the misdeeds of the government must go."[30]

In his statements and writings, Narayan hailed the youth movement as unprecedented. For the first time since independence, the Indian people were "no longer prepared to remain helpless spectators of wrongs and evils." He insisted that the demand for resignation of the Bihar ministry and dissolution of the state legislature were eminently justified: "what are the people to do when constitutional methods and the established democratic institutions fail to respond to their will?" Narayan conceded that such mobilization "might appear to some, especially those in power, to be unconstitutional and anti-democratic." Yet he sought to distinguish between them. "Unconstitutional it certainly is," he wrote, "but not anti-democratic."[31] Narayan was not content to claim the sanction of the sovereign people for his movement; he also confuted the democratic standing of the prime minister. Indira Gandhi imagined that owing to "her electoral victories, the people are with her . . . But she is living in a fool's paradise." In her own state of Uttar Pradesh, the Congress (R) had polled only 32 per cent of the vote in the recent elections. "When 68 per cent of the votes polled were against her and her party, even assuming that the elections were free and fair, how can she or anyone else claim that the people are behind her and her party?" If anything, it underscored the "utter defectiveness of our electoral system."[32]

Narayan's thinking about the way forward was vague and inchoate. "Clearly something has to be done," he wrote, "to seize upon the present moment and taking advantage of the people's upsurge." He envisaged "permanent organs of people's power" at every level of politics.[33] Addressing a major rally in Patna on 5 June 1974, he averred that this movement was not merely for the dissolution of the Bihar legislature, but rather "a total revolution." What this amounted to, Narayan never spelt out. An empty signifier, it was the perfect slogan for his populist

agenda of linking heterogenous demands and demarcating a sharp, antagonistic boundary separating the "people" from the corrupt structures of power.[34] For the moment, Narayan vociferously demanded the removal of the ministry and dissolution of the assembly: "It no longer matters that they were elected at the polls . . . They have absolutely no right to remain when they are no longer representatives of the people, when they have become anti-people, have turned into the enemies of the people."[35]

Indira Gandhi hit back by publicly questioning Narayan's probity and his claims to the moral high ground. In private, she struck a supercilious note while disavowing any ill will. "As a political thinker," she wrote to him, "you are entitled to speculate upon political forms and techniques (such as your concept of partyless government)." These ideas appeared "rather utopian" to her and could perhaps work "if the whole population consisted of Jayaprakash-s." Narayan replied that he was not visualizing a partyless democracy but "the evolution of organs of people's power to exercise strict vigilance over democratic processes—elections, for instance—and the institutions of democracy." The Bihar movement was a step towards such invigilance.[36]

The prime minister had no interest in political theory, but she was keen on neutralizing the "JP movement." Senior figures in the government and the Congress party wrote to Narayan urging him to reconsider his stance. Home Minister Uma Shankar Dikshit asked Narayan whether his "declared programme of revolution" was indeed nonviolent: "Was what happened in Gujarat with many MLAs and other Congressmen violent or non-violent"?[37] Tarakeshwari Sinha, a well-known leader from Bihar, told Narayan that his call for the dissolution of the assembly was "rather surprising . . . remote bureaucratic control is in no way a better substitute to democratically elected members of the legislature who have to be answerable to the people for their survival."[38] Alongside persuasion, Indira Gandhi geared up for coercion, deploying the central government's paramilitary forces in Bihar.

As Narayan's movement acquired tempo, the opposition parties in the state coalesced around it. The Socialists swung strongly behind their old comrade and leader, though their capacity for mobilization was no longer as strong in the state. The Bharatiya Lok Dal (BLD),

the Congress (O), and the Jana Sangh assessed that the "JP movement" was the strongest challenge to the Indira Gandhi regime and offered their cooperation. The Jana Sangh had yet another motivation. As L.K. Advani would write, they "saw an opportunity in the JP movement to significantly expand the Jana Sangh's mass appeal and support base across the country."[39] A coordination committee of opposition parties met weekly at Narayan's residence to chalk out plans and programs.

Yet the BLD and the Congress (O) were unwilling to put their shoulder to the wheel. By mid-September, Narayan was sufficiently frustrated to write to a senior congressman and old friend: "what has really distressed me is that the Congress (O) in Bihar has done so little so far in support of the movement . . . not a single Congress (O) MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] has resigned from the Assembly yet." Nor were they active on the ground.[40] The Communist Party of India had no truck with the movement, but the CPI (M) and the Maoists—both small parties in the state—lent their support to the political demands while refraining from active participation. The general secretary of the CPI (M) told Narayan that "it is difficult for our party to join in any joint demonstration and have a common platform with Jan Sangh and other similar communal organizations . . . Similarly our party thinks that it will not help any democratic movement to be developed in conjunction with Congress (O) and the Bharatiya Lok Dal who have declared a programme which is in favour of landlords and big capitalists."[41]

The Jana Sangh thus emerged as the most organized political force in the movement. The party's student wing, the ABVP, was already the dominant player in the Chhatra Sangharsh Samiti. The Jana Sangh also roped in personnel from its parent organization, the RSS, to serve as office bearers and as volunteers in processions, demonstrations, and public meetings. By December 1974, the RSS supremo, Balasaheb Deoras, declared that Narayan's movement was "a force for the good of the society." The same month, the Working Committee of the Jana Sangh passed a resolution in favor of full participation in the movement because it sought "to establish the primacy of the people over the government."[42] Eventually, Nana Deshmukh—a senior Jana Sangh

leader from the RSS—would emerge as Narayan's principal lieutenant in the struggle against the government.

Narayan was warned privately and publicly about the widespread and potentially baleful influence of the RSS on his movement. But he had enough political sense to recognize that he was utterly dependent on the Jana Sangh and its affiliates. Initially, he sought to minimize their role: "the RSS is of course in the movement but . . . is merely playing a small part in a big mass movement."[43] Over time, Narayan deluded himself that the Jana Sangh and the RSS were casting aside their Hindu nationalist ideology. Speaking at the twentieth plenary session of the Jana Sangh in March 1975, he declared that he had learnt from the experience of the past months that the Jana Sangh and the RSS were not reactionary, let alone fascist, forces.[44]

Narayan had to make strenuous efforts to ensure that the movement did not run out of steam. His importunate demands for the resignation of Bihar MLAs went largely unheeded: only 42 of 318 responded. To keep up the momentum of mobilization, the CSS organized a series of *bandhs* culminating in a three-day statewide shutdown in October 1974. Narayan sought to take the movement to other states where the Jana Sangh, BLD, or the Congress (O) had organizational muscle. He convened a meeting of leaders of opposition parties to consider "how pressure can be brought to bear on the central government."[45] Narayan also announced a plan to establish "people's governments" from the village upwards. The aim was to set up 150 such "*Janata Sarkar*" in Bihar by March 1975, but eventually only 18 were declared as formed. By the end of 1974, the "JP movement" seemed on the wane.

Alongside repression, the prime minister also kept open a back-channel of communication with Narayan. Her principal secretary, P.N. Dhar, roped in two of Narayan's close and longstanding associates, K.S. Radhakrishna and Sugata Dasgupta, to examine if Narayan's demands could reasonably be met. In weeks of discussions away from the public glare, Narayan did not advance any concrete suggestions on corruption, electoral reform, and so forth. In any event, the differences over the dissolution of the Bihar assembly proved insuperable. On 1 November 1974, Indira Gandhi met Narayan in Delhi. She offered to suspend the assembly, but Narayan wanted her to declare that the assembly would

not be reconvened before the next elections and that president's rule would continue until then. This proviso was unacceptable to her. The same day, she announced at a public meeting that the issue would be decided in the next elections.[46]

The prime minister's intransigence, coupled with the flagging popular campaign, led Narayan to lean more heavily on the political parties, especially the Jana Sangh, for mobilization. A march on parliament was announced in early 1975 and a national charter of demands was drafted. Narayan's student allies looked on with some concern. The president of Delhi University's Student Union, Arun Jaitley (later finance minister of India), wrote to him protesting the exclusion of students from the preparation of the charter: "Since the students have been in the forefront of this entire movement for the last one year, it would have been more than desirable that the students' viewpoints were represented." Indeed, it would be "extremely desirable" to include in the drafting committee people not "directly involved in the mainstream of political life."[47] However, students were no longer Narayan's principal source of power.

The march on parliament took place on 6 March. Narayan did not pull a million-strong crowd as he had hoped; yet, by all accounts, this was one of the largest processions ever witnessed in the capital city. After exhorting the gathering to gird for the long haul, Narayan presented a "charter of people's demand" to the speaker of the lower house.[48] Indira Gandhi returned fire two days later, stating publicly that the movement was aimed at destroying Indian democracy and insinuating that it was supported by funds from abroad.

Soon there was an unexpected coda to the Gujarat movement. Although the state legislature had been dissolved a year ago, the union government had refrained from holding fresh elections. Gujarat had been reeling under a severe drought—nearing a famine in some parts—for several months. New Delhi claimed that the state administration was embroiled in relief efforts and would be unable to prepare for elections until later in the year. The opposition parties believed that Indira Gandhi was afraid of losing the state and hence adopting dilatory tactics. Their assessment was right—up to a point. For the prime minister was rather more concerned about going in for an election

against the backdrop of drought and deprivation, and she preferred to wait until the monsoons arrived. Reprising his role of a year earlier, Morarji Desai yet again announced an indefinite fast from 7 April and demanded that elections be held before the end of May 1975. Desai was also candid about the political context of his decision. The movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan, he wrote to the prime minister, had "kindled a new hope in our masses." Instead of welcoming this change, the government was "misusing its machinery to suppress it and hurling unbecoming charges at the movement and its leader."[49]

Indira Gandhi felt that the government "should not be cowed down by the threat." After discussing the matter with her cabinet, she sent a placatory missive to Desai.[50] Preparations for the elections, she assured him, would begin immediately after the monsoon in September 1975: "A difference of three to four months cannot be a reason for the extraordinary step that you contemplate." Urging Desai to reconsider his decision, she invited him to meet and discuss the matter. The meeting on 4 April failed to break the impasse. Desai felt that the prime minister was unyielding in her stance and unprepared "to appreciate the reasons which I had given."[51] He began fasting three days later.

The government soon felt the heat. The prime minister's colleagues and advisors differed on how best to tackle the situation. Secretary Dhar strongly held that "if the government gave in to Morarji, democratic processes would receive a big jolt." He advised the prime minister to allow the fast to end, if necessary, in a tragedy. The Congress party may well forfeit Gujarat, but such threats would never again be held out. Unsurprisingly, this view had few takers in the party. The Congress president, D.K. Barooah, was almost alone in thinking along these lines. Foreign Minister Y.B. Chavan wanted the government to give in, for Desai's death would harm the country and the party. The more vocal, younger party members such as Vasant Sathe held that even Morarji's detractors respected him: if he died fasting, "the Congress would become an object of hatred forever." The governor of Gujarat reported that passions were running high and "if something happened to Morarji, even his main opponents would not forgive the PM." A week into the fast, Dhar noted, the prime minister was "getting more and more rattled" and the "barometer was going up."[52] Two days later, Indira

Gandhi decided to give in. "Your life is in danger," she wrote to Desai, "and my colleagues and I would not like the valuable life of a distinguished freedom fighter to be sacrificed." The government assented to his suggestion of holding the elections around 7 June 1975.[53]

The announcement was hailed by the opposition as a victory of the people and humbling of Indira Gandhi's government. The opposition parties quickly set to work and stitched together a poll alliance labelled the Janata Morcha (People's Front), consisting of the Congress (O), the Jana Sangh, the Socialists, and the BKD. The high-minded rhetoric of Desai and Narayan did not preclude some low political maneuvers: not least a tie-up with Chiman Patel, the reviled former chief minister against whom the Navnirman movement had been launched and who had since deserted the Congress party. All this paid off. Despite vigorous campaigning by Indira Gandhi, the "Janata Morcha" secured a majority. Unlike in Uttar Pradesh the previous year, the first-past-the-post system now worked in the opposition's favor. Congress (R) had polled 40.7 per cent of the vote and secured 75 constituencies (losing 65 from its previous tally) of 182, while the four main opposition parties cumulatively polled 34.6 per cent of the vote but took 78 seats. Opposition unity coupled with a strong anti-incumbent sentiment—ignited in this case by the severe drought, as well as the Navnirman movement—was evidently the recipe for success.

7

COUP D'ÉTAT

The political verdict in Gujarat was accompanied by an altogether more damning legal verdict: of the Allahabad high court on a case pertaining to Indira Gandhi's election in March 1971. The suit had been filed by Raj Narain—the candidate of the Samyukta Socialist Party whom she had defeated by over 110,000 votes in the constituency of Rae Bareli in Uttar Pradesh. The election petition to the high court accused Indira Gandhi of violating the provisions of the Representation of People's Act, 1951. The gravamen of the charge was that her campaign had been assisted by a government official, the armed forces, and the police. Further, they had used government vehicles, exceeded the prescribed limit for campaign expenses, and handed out liquor and blankets to corrupt voters. The case had wended its way through the legal system over the next four years.[1]

In mid-November 1974, the prime minister's secretariat was impelled to take a closer look at the matter, for the case now centered on the role of an official previously in the employ of the secretariat, Yashpal Kapoor. Technically an "officer on special duty," Kapoor was a handyman of Indira Gandhi's. Ahead of the 1971 elections, he had resigned from the secretariat to work on her campaign. Kapoor's resignation had been accepted by Principal Secretary Haksar on 25 January 1971, but he had already been at work in Rae Bareli from 14 January. This was a clear transgression of the law. When the case appeared to gain traction, the prime minister's secretariat had sought to cover its tracks: initially, by tampering with the

record to show that the resignation letter had been submitted on 13 January; and, subsequently, by destroying the relevant mail register.[2]

In February 1975 Haksar was summoned by the Allahabad high court. Just a month earlier, he had returned to government as deputy chairman of the Planning Commission. Notwithstanding his qualms about tampering with the official record, Haksar was willing to perjure himself to protect the prime minister. Thus, he told the court that Kapoor had met him with the resignation letter on 13 January 1971. He had verbally accepted the resignation without consulting the prime minister, so enabling Kapoor to start working on the campaign. This was far from the truth. As the officer who went through the record in her secretariat privately noted: "Action was taken on it [resignation letter] only on the 25th. The official noting makes it clear that there was nothing to suggest that its acceptance had been mooted before the 25th."[3] On cross-examination, Haksar was obviously unable to cite any rule under which appointments could be made or terminated orally; he merely insisted that this was not unusual. On 18 March 1975, the prime minister was called in to testify in the high court—a first in the history of India. She blandly maintained that, while there was no rule authorizing her principal secretary to make appointments, she was unaware of any rule to the contrary. At any rate, she had always assumed that he was competent to make such appointments.

In his judgment of 12 June 1975, Justice Jagmohan Lal Sinha of the Allahabad high court acquitted Indira Gandhi on all counts barring two. The charges on which he held her guilty of corrupt practices were that the Uttar Pradesh government had constructed rostrums and provided special power connections for her election meetings; and that her election agent, Yashpal Kapoor, had been working in the government when the campaign began. Accordingly, Justice Sinha voided Indira Gandhi's election to the parliament and debarred her from holding any elective post for six years. But he gave her a stay of twenty days to enable an appeal to the supreme court.

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The verdict came as a thunderclap to admirers and adversaries of the prime minister alike. The former squawked that the prime minister was

being dethroned for a venial offence. The latter hailed it as vindicating all the accusations of corruption leveled against her. The following day, opposition parties began a protest outside the president of India's official residence, demanding that he give her the sack. Jayaprakash Narayan denounced Indira Gandhi's continuation in office as "a most shameful and cynical performance." Having been found guilty of corruption, "she had compounded her guilt by deciding to continue as prime minister without any legal or moral right to the office."[4]

The prime minister was not minded to relinquish power. The law minister, H.R. Gokhale, approached the eminent lawyer Nani Palkhivala to argue her case in the supreme court. Palkhivala was a curious choice. We may recall that he had argued the bank nationalization, the privy purse, and the Kesavananda Bharati cases against the government. He had also been a vocal critic of the supersession of judges of the supreme court. In November 1974, he had published a book describing how the Indira Gandhi regime had assailed the constitution into utter decrepitude. "There are times in a country's history," he had written, "when inaction and silence can be a culpable wrong, and we are living in such times." He had held out a stark warning: "In India freedom is not more than one election away from extinction."[5] Such are the vagaries of the liberal conscience that Palkhivala not only agreed to appear for Indira Gandhi, but also opined that there was no legal or political reason for her to resign before the appeal was heard.

Palkhivala's view fit like a glove with those of her trusted advisors and assorted sycophants. Above all, her younger son Sanjay Gandhi counselled against resignation. Sanjay had been a controversial presence throughout the prime minister's tenure. He had returned from England without completing his apprenticeship at Rolls-Royce, determined to manufacture in India an affordable "people's car." His application for a manufacturing license had been granted in 1970 over those of several established foreign automobile companies. Subsequently, he had gotten a hefty loan from two of the nationalized banks. Crony capitalism had been a staple of the license regime under the planned economy, but this had taken it several notches higher. The opposition had denounced these favors. Haksar, too, had cautioned her against the taint—only to draw the wrath of the younger Gandhi and hasten his own departure from

the prime minister's secretariat. Although his venture had visibly failed to take off, Indira Gandhi had stayed protective of Sanjay. If anything, she knew that he had embarked on a venture that could turn out ruinously expensive: "my heart aches for the suffering he may have to bear."[6] Meanwhile, after the 1972 elections, Sanjay had cultivated his own acolytes in the party, especially in Delhi and the neighboring state of Haryana where his car factory was situated. He had also become the moving spirit behind the Youth Congress—the rank and file of which was bewitched by his brusque demeanor and decisive style.

Now, at the moment of his mother's peril, Sanjay swung into action to throw a protective ring around her. Working with a group of officials in the prime minister's house and the Delhi government, as well as the chief minister of Haryana, he orchestrated a massive show of support for Indira Gandhi by busing in throngs of supporters to her residence for nearly two weeks. These demonstrations of popular acclamation were aimed in part at squelching critical voices within the Congress party.

A small but prominent group of dissidents had emerged in the party during the Bihar movement. Ironically, this group centered the left-leaning "Young Turks"—Chandra Shekhar, Mohan Dharia, and Krishan Kant—who had rallied to her banner during the showdown with the syndicate. Ahead of the march on the parliament, they had urged the prime minister to conciliate and accommodate Narayan. More worrying was the tacit support they had got from the veteran minister Jagjivan Ram. Indira Gandhi had fired a shot across the bow by sacking Dharia, a junior minister, from the cabinet. Now, she was acutely aware that even a temporary exit from office might permanently impair her political standing. On 18 June 1975, the Congress parliamentary party adopted a resolution with an overwhelming majority of 450 to 44 that Indira Gandhi was "indispensable to the nation."

Two days later, Palkhivala filed her petition seeking an unconditional stay of Justice Sinha's verdict until her appeal was finally decided by the supreme court. The court was on summer recess, so the appeal came up before the vacation judge—V.R. Krishna Iyer. The latter had had an interesting political and judicial career. Elected to the Kerala assembly as an independent candidate in 1957, he had been appointed

home and law minister in the first Communist government in the state of Kerala. Indira Gandhi had played a leading role, in her capacity as Congress president, in the agitation that had led to the dismissal of the Kerala government. A little over a decade on, she had been wooing the Communist Party of India to burnish her progressive credentials and prop up her government after she had split the Congress. Meanwhile, Krishna Iyer had in 1968 been appointed a judge in the Kerala high court. Three years later, he found himself in the law commission. In 1973, he was elevated to the supreme court, on the recommendation of Mohan Kumaramangalam and Gokhale, who were looking to pack the court with progressive judges.

Prior to the hearing, Gokhale rang Krishna Iyer and sought a meeting. Sensing an attempt at influencing him to grant a stay, the latter declined to meet but heard the matter the following day.[7] After a marathon hearing lasting nearly eight hours, he reserved the judgment for the very next day. In his order of 24 June 1975, Krishna Iyer maintained that there had been no precedent in the past two decades for a grant of an "absolute stay" as sought by Indira Gandhi. At the same time, he distinguished between her impugned position as a member of parliament and her office as prime minister. The "balance of convenience"—administrative stability and policy continuity during a short period of appeal—worked in her favor. Accordingly, Krishna Iyer granted her a conditional stay. Until her appeal was disposed of by the supreme court, the electoral disqualification was suspended; though she could not participate in parliamentary proceedings, or vote, or yet draw salary as an MP. At the same time, in her capacity as prime minister, she could address the parliament and draw remuneration.

Justice Iyer pointedly wrote that the conditional stay "substantially preserves the position of the petitioner as Member of Parliament and does not adversely affect her legal status as Prime Minister . . . There will thus be no legal embargo on her holding the office of Prime Minister." Although the judge refused to enter into the merits of Sinha's judgment, he noted that the decision "does not involve the petitioner in any of the graver electoral vices set out in Section 123 of the [Representation of the People] Act." Such "draconian laws," he went on, "must alert a wakeful and quick-acting legislature."[8]

The opposition pounced on Justice Iyer's decision. They had already met the president of India and submitted a memorandum stating that her continuation in office amounted to a "grave constitutional crisis." Notwithstanding the legal and political import of the stay granted her, the opposition now claimed that the denial of an unconditional stay was a mortal blow to the prime minister. On 25 June, the main opposition parties formed a ten-member National Programme Committee to come up with a plan of action. The program—drafted by Nana Deshmukh of the Jana Sangh, who was also tasked with overseeing its execution—included processions and strikes led by students and youth; blockading the offices of business and industry leaders supporting Indira Gandhi; gate meetings in mills and factories; lunch-hour meetings of government employees; and massive demonstrations outside the prime minister's residence.[9]

At a huge rally of opposition parties in New Delhi on the evening of 25 June, Jayaprakash Narayan declared that after the supreme court's order "her continuance in office has become even more untenable." Calling for "a prolonged civil disobedience movement," he exhorted the youth to be prepared to go to jail rather than their classrooms. "I warn the people," Narayan thundered, "that Mrs Indira Gandhi is trying to establish a dictatorship in the country." He appealed to "the Armed Forces and the Police not to carry out any illegal orders," declaring that he was prepared to be tried for "treason" for giving such a call to the military and the police. Morarji Desai, who presided over the meeting, told a foreign journalist: "We intend to overthrow her, to force her to resign. For good. The lady won't survive our movement . . . Thousands of us will surround her house to prevent her from going out or receiving visitors. We'll camp there night and day shouting her to resign."[10]

Unbeknown to them, Indira Gandhi was preparing a preemptive strike. On 23 June, the evening before Justice Iyer pronounced his order, the Delhi government was told by the prime minister's staff—in her residence, not the secretariat—to prepare to arrest opposition leaders after their rally. In the wake of the judgment on 24 June, she decided to take drastic action against opposition leaders as soon as there were signs of any effort to turf her out of office. The crackdown would

follow the planned opposition rally on 25 June. The same day, Indira Gandhi sent messages to the chief ministers of states ruled by her party, informing them of the planned action and asking them to be prepared to take preventive measures including arrests of potential agitators.[11]

The next morning, 25 June, Indira Gandhi met Siddhartha Shankar Ray, the chief minister of West Bengal. She apprised him of the reports at hand of the opposition's plans for a movement against her continuation in office, including the contents of the speech that Jayaprakash Narayan would deliver that evening, and wanted to consider the legal justification for the planned course of action. The scion of a prominent legal family, Ray had started out as a barrister in the Calcutta high court before entering politics in his state. He had shot to prominence as the youngest law minister in the West Bengal government in 1957. A little over a decade later, he had thrown in his lot with Indira Gandhi's Congress (R). As leader of the opposition in the state legislative assembly, he had connived in the dismissal of the United Front government. Rewarded by a brief stint as minister of education in Indira Gandhi's cabinet of 1971, he had returned to West Bengal as chief minister the following year. His tenure had been notable for the reign of terror unleashed on the Naxalite militants and their alleged accomplices. Amnesty International reported in 1974 that some 20,000 youngsters were incarcerated under preventive detention laws. The police had resorted to torture, rape, and murder: all under the veneer of restoring law and order.[12] Given this luminous and loyal record, it is hardly surprising that Ray had emerged as a trusty advisor to whom Indira Gandhi turned at this perilous moment.

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This was not the first time Indira Gandhi had consulted Ray on the emergency provisions of the constitution. Her thoughts had originally tended in this direction owing to her concern about the growing involvement and prominence of the RSS in Narayan's movement. She had long regarded the RSS as a clone of European fascism—a phenomenon she had observed up close. As far back as 1947, she had written to her father that "the growth of this organization is so amazingly like the Brown Shirts of Germany, that if we are not very quick on our toes it

will grow beyond our control . . . The recent history of Germany is too close for us to be able to forget it for an instant."[13]

At the height of the Bihar movement, her airing of concern about the RSS struck her critics as hollow and self-serving. "At the rate things are progressing," wrote her erstwhile chief economic advisor, Ashok Mitra, "progressive elements among the police personnel too will be organizing a convention against fascism."[14] In fact, well before the Bihar movement, Indira Gandhi had insisted that her antipathy to proto-fascist groups on the Hindu right was "not a put-on show, it is something that has gone deep into my being, because I have seen what it did to a whole people, how in one country a whole people could not resist a small party who in the name of democracy overthrew democracy."[15] By January 1975, she was convinced this was the RSS's motivation for participating in Narayan's movement. Narayan summarily dismissed the claim. In a speech to Jana Sangh on 7 March, he declared, "If the Jana Sangh is fascist, then Jayaprakash Narayan is also fascist."[16]

As in the past, Indira Gandhi also espied the contours of an external conspiracy instigating those ranged against her at home. The impresario, in her assessment, was the United States. Since the Bangladesh war of 1971, she had asked Indian intelligence agencies to monitor closely American activities in India. The Intelligence Bureau reported in September 1972 that "Indo-American relations are now at an all-time low." But the Americans were trying to refurbish their contacts in the Indian officialdom through "a series of measures," including "trips, gifts, meets, programmes, surveillance etc."[17]

Her outlook darkened after the US-orchestrated coup and assassination of Chile's Salvador Allende in September 1973. She was hosting a dinner for Fidel Castro when the news arrived. "At that dramatic moment," Castro recalled, Indira Gandhi told him: "What they have done to Allende they want to do to me also. There are people here, connected with the same foreign forces that acted in Chile, who would like to eliminate me."[18] The Communist Party of India also peddled this line about an imperialist conspiracy after Allende's assassination.

The prime minister was enough of a realist to know that a prolonged standoff with the United States would not redound to India's advantage. Thus, in March 1974, she told her ambassador in Washington,

T.N. Kaul, that "for very practical reasons I am anxious for better relations with the US." "What casts a shadow on our relations," she continued, "is their interference in our internal affairs – whether the Embassy, the Consul-General, or the CIA is responsible, I do not know." The activities of certain individuals "connected with these US agencies and the Israeli Consul-General arouses suspicion." Her principal problem was that "our intelligence agencies are exasperatingly inadequate and inefficient."[19]

By late 1974, Indira Gandhi came to regard the dangers posed by the RSS's activism as linked to an American-supported attempt at destabilizing her government. In the first week of January 1975, her key aide, cabinet minister and fundraiser for the party, L.N. Mishra, was assassinated in Bihar. Soon after, there was an attempt on the life of the chief justice of the supreme court. The prime minister believed these developments were evidence not only of the violence unchained by Narayan's movement, but also of a deeper conspiracy against her government.[20]

The prime minister was shaken up by the assassination of L.N. Mishra and felt "it was imperative to take some strong action immediately." She homed in on the RSS. On 7 January 1975, she held a meeting with senior officials of the home ministry, demanding a ban on the RSS and the arrest of its leaders and cadres. The bureaucrats were unsure that a ban would help. In any event, they had to consider the legal framework within which this could be done. Article 352 of the constitution empowered the president of India to declare a state of emergency if the security of India was threatened by "war or external aggression or internal disturbance." In fact, an emergency had been declared under this provision during the Bangladesh war of December 1971—and this declaration of emergency had not been revoked. Nevertheless, the officials suggested that a ban and crackdown on the RSS and other groups such as the Ananda Marg (also suspected of having a hand in Mishra's assassination) might need the declaration of a new emergency.[21]

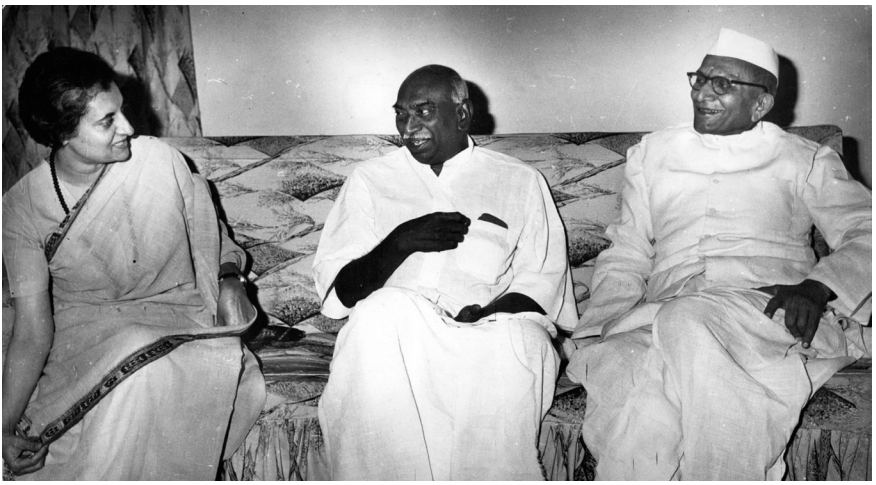
It was in this context that Indira Gandhi had consulted Ray. The latter had discussed the matter with party president Barooah and law minister Gokhale. In a handwritten note on 8 January 1975, Ray had

told her that Gokhale would have "a draft ordinance ready by tonight" for the cabinet's approval and the president's signature. Meanwhile, all Congress chief ministers must be told to prepare lists of all prominent RSS (and Ananda Marg) members in their state: "The idea is to swing into action immediately after the ordinance is ready." In the event, after a meeting with Barooah, Gokhale, and Ray the next day, the prime minister decided against an immediate crackdown on the RSS.[22]

Ahead of the Allahabad high court's verdict, Indira Gandhi had again mused to Ray that the country needed a "shock treatment" entailing the use of emergency or drastic powers. On that occasion, Ray had told her that they could manage with the existing laws, underlining the "success with which they had tackled the law and order problems of West Bengal within the framework of the laws then in force." Now, on 25 June 1975, the idea of declaring an internal emergency was back on the table: as prelude to a massive crackdown on opposition parties, the RSS, and their affiliates. Ray asked the prime minister for some time to consult the law and left her residence. When he returned around 4.30 that afternoon, Ray advised her to use the provisions of Article 352 of the constitution to impose an internal emergency.[23]

Soon after, Indira Gandhi and Ray met the president of India, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed. A senior congressman from Assam, Ahmed had held several portfolios in Indira Gandhi's cabinets. In 1974 he had been elevated to the highest office in the republic. Political experience apart, Ahmed was also a Cambridge-educated lawyer called to the bar from Inner Temple and had served as advocate general of his state. At this critical juncture, though, Ahmed shied away from using his legal acumen or political judgment. The prime minister gave a grim account of the developing situation. Having heard her, the president asked Ray for the exact words of Article 352. Ahmed probed neither of them and merely asked her to make a formal recommendation.

On the drive back, Ray suggested that Indira Gandhi consult some senior colleagues, especially the party president D.K. Barooah. However, she wanted to make the decision without going to the cabinet. After a quick look at the government's rules of business, Ray told her that she was empowered to make the recommendation to the president and have it subsequently ratified by the cabinet. Ray also drafted the letter



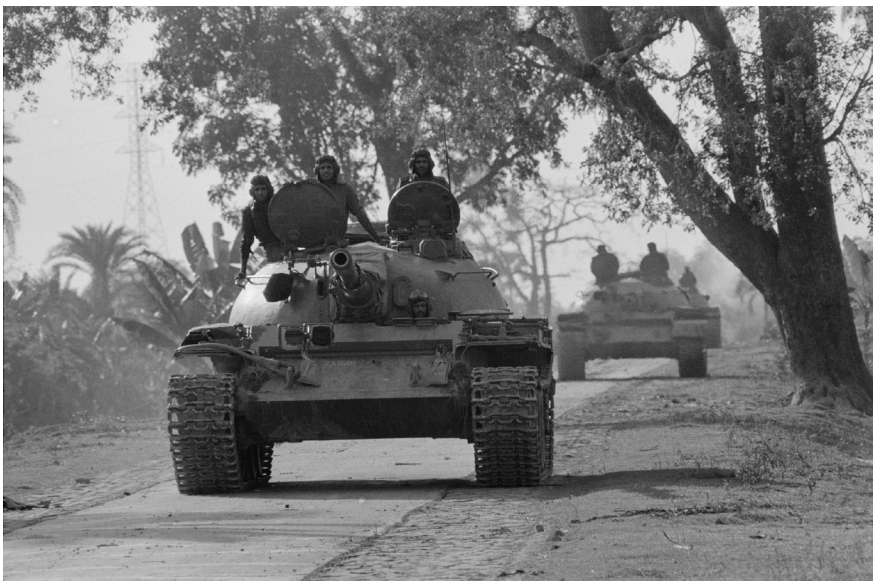
1. Colleagues and contenders: (from left) Indira Gandhi, K. Kamaraj, and Morarji Desai, March 1967.

2. On campaign: Indira Gandhi in Calcutta, February 1967.

3. Day of the debacle: Indira Gandhi beside a bulletin board showing election returns, February 1967.

4. Indira Gandhi greeted by her supporters after her party won a two-thirds majority, March 1971.

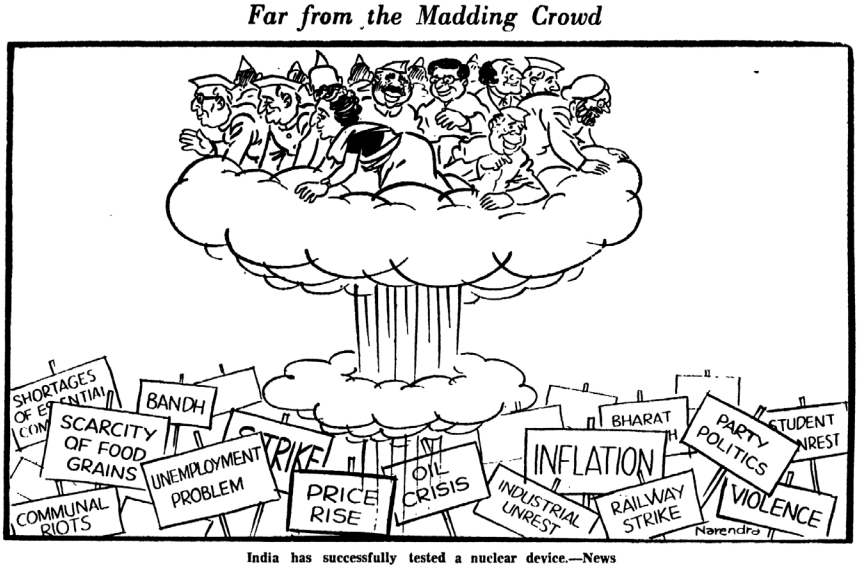
5. Refugees from East Pakistan (Bangladesh) encamped in West Bengal, 1971.



6. Indian army tanks roll into Jessore in Bangladesh, December 1971.

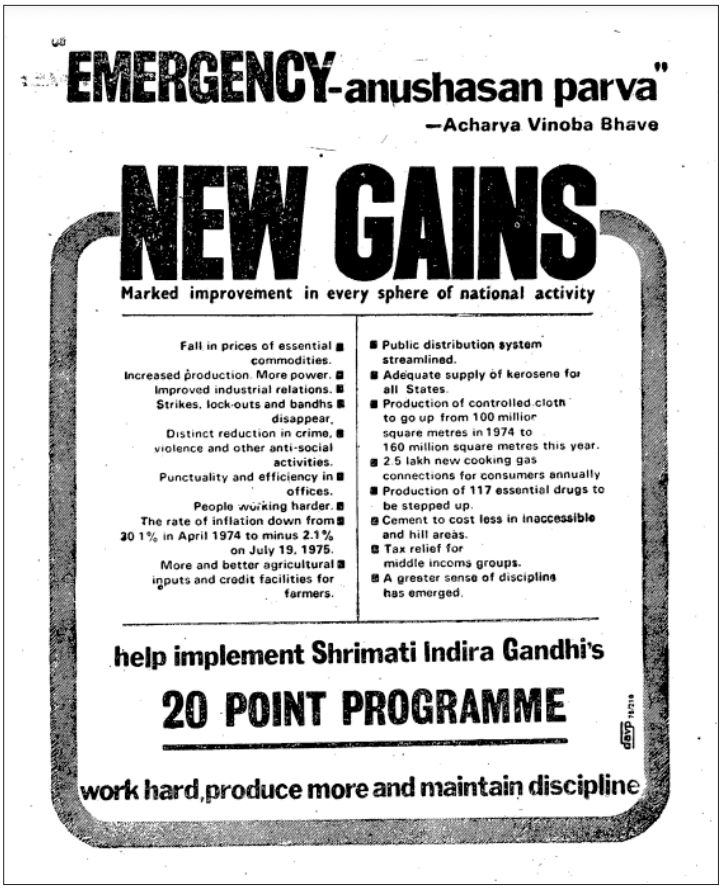
7. All the prime minister's men: (from left) T.N. Kaul, D.P. Dhar, P.N. Haksar, and P.N. Dhar sitting opposite the Pakistan delegation at the Shimla conference, June 1972.

8. A family planning camp for young women, 1972.

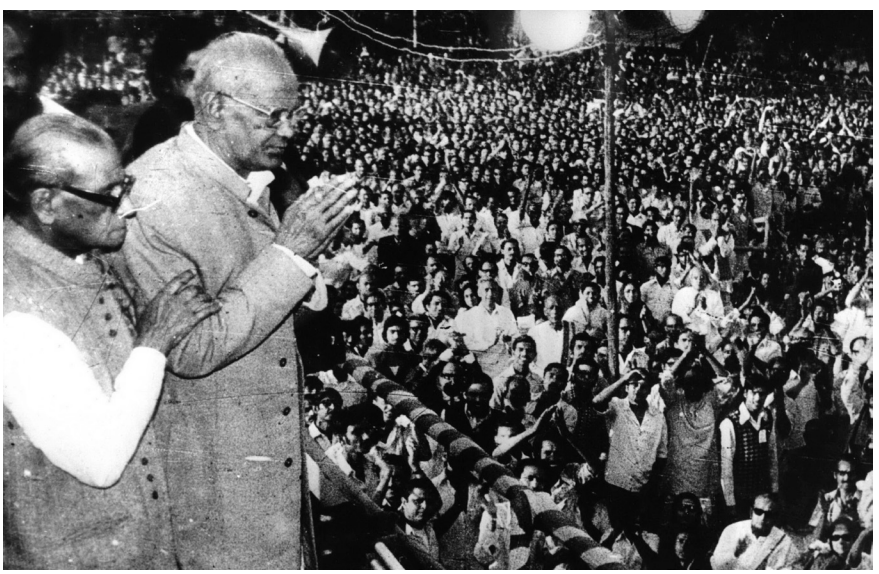


9. A cartoon by Shankar on the concurrent crises and the government's response, May 1974.

10. Jayaprakash Narayan leading a march on the (locked) Bihar State Government secretariat, October 1974.


EMERGENCY-anushasan parva"
—Acharya Vinoba Bhave
NEW GAINS
Marked improvement in every sphere of national activity
Fall in prices of essential commodities.
Increased production. More power.
Improved industrial relations.
Strikes, lock-outs and bandhs disappear.
Distinct reduction in crime, violence and other anti-social activities.
Punctuality and efficiency in offices.
People working harder.
The rate of inflation down from 30.1% in April 1974 to minus 2.1% on July 19, 1975.
More and better agricultural inputs and credit facilities for farmers.
Public distribution system streamlined.
Adequate supply of kerosene for all States.
Production of controlled cloth to go up from 100 million square metres in 1974 to 160 million square metres this year.
2.5 lakh new cooking gas connections for consumers annually
Production of 117 essential drugs to be stepped up.
Cement to cost less in inaccessible and hill areas.
Tax relief for middle income groups.
A greater sense of discipline has emerged.
help implement Shrimati Indira Gandhi's
20 POINT PROGRAMME
work hard, produce more and maintain discipline

11. Twenty points of propaganda for the Emergency, December 1975.



12. Jayaprakash Narayan campaigning for the Janata Party, February 1977.

13. The team of rivals: (from left) Charan Singh, Morarji Desai, and Jagjivan Ram, July 1977.

14. The final days of Janata: (from left) Y.B. Chavan, Jagjivan Ram, C.M. Stephen, and Prime Minister Charan Singh.

15. The heir apparent: Sanjay Gandhi, 1977.

16. Last Post: Indira Gandhi's funeral cortege, 3 November 1984.

to the president and the text of the presidential proclamation. Barooah was called in later that evening and set to work with Ray in drafting a speech by the prime minister. When belatedly informed that night, Home Minister Brahmananda Reddy felt that the powers available under the existing emergency could be used. The prime minister went through the charade of considering this suggestion, only to send for him again and tell him in no uncertain terms that a separate internal emergency had to be imposed. The prime minister's letter was delivered to President Ahmed at 10.30 p.m. on 25 June 1975.

The letter baldly stated that "information has reached us which indicates that there is an imminent danger to the security of India being threatened by internal disturbance." In these circumstances, if the president was "satisfied," he should issue a proclamation under Article 352. The prime minister would have liked to consult the cabinet, "but unfortunately this is not possible tonight . . . I shall mention the matter to the Cabinet first thing tomorrow morning." Article 352, however, explicitly stated that the president ought not to issue such a proclamation unless the union cabinet recommended it in writing. The president's secretary pointedly told him that "it would be constitutionally impermissible for him to act in the manner suggested." The president had to act on the advice of his council of ministers and hence there was no question of his personal satisfaction.

Thereupon, Ahmed spoke on the phone with Indira Gandhi. Minutes later a functionary from the prime minister's residence came with the draft declaration for the president's signature. Ahmed promptly signed and sent it back to the prime minister. By this time, the massive crackdown on the opposition was underway. The prime minister met her cabinet at six the next morning and informed her colleagues of the presidential proclamation. With hardly a demurring voice, the cabinet ratified her action. Two hours later, Indira Gandhi went on All India Radio and tersely said: "The President has declared a state of emergency. There is no need to panic."

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Because the constitution provided for declaration of emergency, it is routinely argued, the prime minister's action was a "lawful suspension

of law."[24] On the contrary, the legality of the action was far from evident. For one thing, Article 352 provided for the declaration of just one emergency—whether on account of war, external aggression, or internal disturbance. In fact, this article was subsequently amended (under the Thirty-eighth Amendment) to provide "the power to issue different Proclamations on different grounds . . . whether or not there is a Proclamation already issued." On 25 June 1975 the emergency declared in December 1971 was in force, as was the Defence India Act passed after the declaration and the Defence of India Rules promulgated under it. The declaration of another "Internal Emergency" was evidently needed to acquire additional powers to clamp down on opponents.

For another, the manner in which the presidential proclamation was issued violated the provisions of Article 352. Written recommendation by the council of ministers was mandatory and could not be obviated by invoking procedural rules that did not apply to this situation. The contrast with 1971 is instructive. In the midst of the war with Pakistan, a cabinet meeting had been convened and a recommendation made to the president. The proclamation had been drafted by the home ministry. After it had been signed by the president, the cabinet secretary had authorized the home ministry to issue the proclamation.

Finally, the actions carried out on the night of 25/26 June—mass arrests of political leaders and cutting power supply to newspaper presses—had no legal basis and were done entirely at the behest of the prime minister.[25] Far from being lawful, the declaration of emergency on 25 June 1975 was a coup d'état: in the original sense of the term a "master-stroke of the state," whose signature elements were surprise and secrecy.[26]

How justified was Indira Gandhi in claiming there was an imminent internal threat to the security of India? The Intelligence Bureau had not submitted any report between 12 June and 25 June which suggested that the internal situation in the country was parlous. Nor did any of the state governments convey such information to the home ministry. Indeed, the home ministry had prepared no contingency plans for an internal emergency.[27] Indira Gandhi would later argue that she had sources beyond Indian intelligence agencies—of whose competence she did not think much. One such source was the CPI, whose narrative

about an externally supported fascist conspiracy she had found plausible. The CPI was asked independently by the Soviet and the Cuban leadership to convey to Indira Gandhi that "a ramified conspiracy had been set in motion to damage and destroy all the leaders in the subcontinent who were responsible for the establishment of Bangladesh."[28] This may have stoked her paranoia. The subsequent assassination of Mujibur Rahman on 15 August 1975 would lead her to claim that she had done the right thing by clamping down.[29] Yet none of this amounted to credible intelligence, let alone information, about an imminent threat.

The prime minister would claim—even to officials close to her—that opposition leaders were being covertly funded from overseas. Addressing officers of the Central Bureau of Investigation on 17 July 1975, she insisted that the opposition had hatched "a massive conspiracy" against her and was also "receiving funding from abroad, of which she had incontrovertible evidence." A month later an Intelligence Bureau report confounded this claim. The money received from abroad by George Fernandes had been deposited in the bank and used for setting up a trust to train labor unions.[30]

In private and public, Indira Gandhi pinned the blame on Jayaprakash Narayan. She wrote to Dr. Benjamin Spock, an old acquaintance, that Narayan had "aligned himself with RSS organization which instigated Mahatma Gandhi's murder and which is fanatically Hindu preaching discrimination against Moslem and Christian minorities . . . In his extreme anger and frustration at lack of popular support he called upon the army and the police to disobey orders. This is what compelled me to take the unpleasant decision."[31]

She was undoubtedly concerned about the course of the "JP movement," especially the involvement of the RSS. But Narayan's call on 25 June for the security forces to disobey illegal orders was not unprecedented. Speaking at a public meeting in February 1975, he asked the police, the paramilitary, and officials deployed in Bihar to refuse to obey orders "that go against their conscience or are immoral." Subsequently, in an interview, Narayan elaborated on his thinking: "the loyalty of the army was to the country, its flag and to the Constitution . . . If any party government or party leader intends to use the army as a means to further

their party and power interests, it is the clear duty . . . of the army not to be so used." The prime minister observed to her officials that "JP was saying things in his speeches that encouraged government servants to spread dis-satisfaction about the government." She wanted to know how this could be controlled.[32]

What had changed by 25 June 1975 was not the content of Narayan's exhortations but the context: both the aims of the movement and the prime minister's political standing. Narayan and key leaders of the opposition now sought to unseat the prime minister—just as the governments of Gujarat and Bihar had been forked out of power. The Allahabad high court's judgment had tarred her with the brush of corruption and undermined her legitimacy. Cracks in her party had widened as a consequence. The conditional bail granted by Justice Iyer had left her in office but diminished her authority in dealing with the looming protests. Facing another mass upsurge in this impaired condition was a deeply unappealing prospect. In these circumstances, she may well have believed that Narayan's calls might fall on more receptive ears. But her moves to nip in the bud the threat to her position had been initiated before she had learnt of Narayan's speech on 25 June. It was a rationalization of the imposition of the Emergency, not the reason it was imposed. The perceived imminent threat was not to India but to Indira—a distinction the prime minister refused to see, owing to her belief that she represented the popular will.

All said, understanding Indira Gandhi's concerns and intentions is not the same thing as causally explaining the onset of the Emergency. Such an explanation must bring together structure, conjuncture, and event. The Indian political system underwent a major transformation between 1967 and 1975. This took place in both the system-wide components: institutional distribution of functions and relative power, and the rules of the game.

The years between 1967 and 1973 witnessed a dramatic shift in relative power towards the executive, especially the office of the prime minister. The Congress split and the stunning victories in the elections of 1971–72, as well as in the Bangladesh war, meant that the parliamentary party ceased to act as a subtle but important restraint on the executive. On the contrary, the party was now beholden to the prime

minister for its political survival. Given the rout of the opposition parties, the parliament's position became merely topographical. This enabled her, in turn, to challenge the functions and powers of the judiciary, culminating in the assertion of prime ministerial power by the supersession of judges and the appointment of a pliant chief justice in the supreme court.

These dramatic power shifts were accompanied by changes in the collective beliefs and expectations of political actors about the constitutive rules of the game of parliamentary democracy. As the game grew increasingly competitive from 1967 onwards, its rules, procedures, and norms were frequently cast aside in pursuit of power. The conjunctural crisis of 1973–74 accelerated this dimension of systemic change. The oil shocks that followed the Arab–Israeli war of October 1973 triggered a tidal wave of global inflation. The resultant distributional conflicts afflicted developed as well as developing economies: India was no exception. Student protests in Gujarat, Bihar, and elsewhere were a direct consequence of this global economic crisis. The student movement's success in ejecting the Congress government in Gujarat and the upsurge in Bihar under Narayan led the main opposition parties to regard extra-parliamentary mass agitation as the political route to weaken the Congress party, given their inability to humble it in the hustings.

This shift in beliefs and expectations occurred across the political spectrum. In April 1974, L.K. Advani told the Jana Sangh's general council that "dethroning an elected government by extra-constitutional means had acquired legitimacy."[33] Six months on, A.B. Vajpayee told his party conference: "The established leadership has been using the parliamentary method only as a cover for protecting their evil designs. The response cannot be confined to the parliamentary level." The Socialist Party adopted a resolution in December 1974: "since the capacity of the parliamentary system to achieve reform and renewal from within is getting severely limited, extra-constitutional action and popular initiative become absolutely necessary."[34]

Further left, the CPI (M) had qualms about joining forces with the Jana Sangh but was willing to help Narayan "achieve the immediate objective of getting this unrepresentative Bihar Assembly and its ministry dissolved." After Justice Sinha's judgment, the party's senior

ideologue, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, wrote that "they do not accept the position that every issue must be solved only through constitutional means."[35] Asked why he was unwilling to wait until the next election to challenge Indira Gandhi, the staunchly anti-communist Morarji Desai replied: "One must strike the iron when it is hot and it's becoming increasingly difficult to defeat her in a general election."[36]

By this time, the rules of the game had little purchase on the Congress party. The parliamentary party's resolution that Indira Gandhi was indispensable to India was ample testimony. Above all, the prime minister herself had ceased to believe in the value of democracy. As she wrote to Yehudi Menuhin, "Democracy is not an end. It is merely a system by which one proceeds towards the goal. Hence democracy cannot be more important than the progress, unity or survival of the country."[37] Against the background of this systemic change and conjunctural crisis came the events of 12 June 1975 that tarnished Indira Gandhi's legitimacy and threatened her continuation in office. The lurch towards a coup d'état was inexorable.

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The Indian constitution provided for wide and sweeping executive powers once emergency was proclaimed under Article 352. The freedoms guaranteed under Article 19—freedoms of speech and expression, of peaceful assembly and forming associations, of movement and residence in the country—were suspended under Article 358 for the duration of the emergency. Article 359 allowed the president to issue an order removing the right to approach any court for the enforcement of the fundamental rights conferred by Part III of the constitution. By contrast, the threshold for parliamentary ratification of the declaration of emergency and subsequent presidential orders was minimal. The proclamation had to be laid before the parliament within a month, approved by resolutions of both houses, and renewed every six months. Each order had to be placed before both houses of parliament as soon as possible.

On 27 June, soon after the countrywide crackdown started, a presidential order was issued suspending the right to move any court for the enforcement of fundamental rights conferred by Article 14 (right to

equality before the law and equal protection of the laws), Article 21 (protection of life and liberty), and Article 22 (protection against arrest and detention without being informed of the grounds). Article 22 had already provided for a law of preventive detention without trial and with minimal safeguards. The Preventive Detention Act of 1950, which enabled detention without trial for twelve months, was regularly used by successive governments.[38] But now the government sought to obviate judicial protection against arrest and detention.

The arrests were made under the Defence of India Act of 1975, which extended the provisions of the Act of 1971 for the duration of the Emergency and another six months for good measure, as well as under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA). MISA, too, had originally been enacted in 1971 against the backdrop of the Bangladesh crisis. There were two salient differences between MISA and the Preventive Detention Act. The latter held that the detainee had to be informed of the grounds for detention within five days and afforded the earliest opportunity to make a representation against the order. MISA extended it to fifteen days. Then there were the provisions relating to issuing a fresh detention order against a person whose existing order had expired. The Preventive Detention Act stated that a fresh detention order could only be issued "where fresh facts have arisen." MISA provided for a fresh detention order even when "no fresh facts have arisen"—with the caveat that the total period of detention could not exceed twelve months from the first day of detention.

The bill when introduced in parliament in mid-June 1971 had evoked howls of protest from the opposition benches. Jana Sangh's Vajpayee had warned that it was "the first step towards dictatorship . . . These powers will not be used against foreign spies but against political opponents." Jyotirmoy Basu of the CPI (M) chimed in, "This is a semi-fascist method of keeping herself and her party perpetually in power." Even the prime minister's erstwhile allies like V.K. Krishna Menon bluntly stated that this was "unguided, unrestrained, uncontrolled, undirected arbitrary power. This is the beginning of the fascist rule." The government had argued that the bill had adequate safeguards. As in the older law, any detention beyond twelve days would require the confirmation by advisory boards comprising three serving or retired

high court judges. Furthermore, the high courts retained their power to issue the writ of *habeas corpus*—an order that required the police to bring a prisoner to court to determine if their detention was lawful. The junior home minister had assured parliament that MISA would not be used against "legitimate trade union activities or legitimate political activity."[39]

Hardly had the ink dried on the legislation than the government darkened it by extending the maximum period of detention to the duration of the existence of the Defence of India Act. Three years on, against the backdrop of the economic crisis and labor militancy, the ambit of MISA was expanded to include smuggling and the maximum period of detention extended to two years. The government also enacted the Conservation of Foreign Exchange and Prevention of Smuggling Activities Act (COFEPOSA), whereby individuals could be detained for smuggling and hoarding well before a detention order was issued. In late 1974, presidential orders were issued under the emergency of 1971 suspending the right to move the courts for protection of certain fundamental rights for the duration of the emergency. The right to appeal to courts for protection of rights was also removed for those arrested under COFEPOSA.[40]

With the proclamation of Emergency in June 1975, all the assurances to the parliament lay dead in the water. MISA was swiftly amended to introduce two new sections. The first stated that arrested persons need not be informed of the grounds and that their detention would be reviewed not by advisory boards but by the state government. The second section held that no person detained under MISA "shall have any right to personal liberty by virtue of natural law or common law, if any." This was aimed at the right of a detenu to move the high court in a writ of *habeas corpus* against their detention. Amendments to MISA in the following months explicitly allowed the government to act against a person on the basis of information in its possession without communicating any of it or allowing them to make any representation. Further, the information possessed by the government would be treated as confidential and against the public interest to disclose. The detenu was not entitled to disclosure of the grounds of arrest or any material. Finally, the period for re-detention was doubled from twelve

to twenty-four months with retrospective effect. COFEPOSA, too, was amended: a detention under it would hold even if the grounds for it were "not relevant," "non-existent," or "invalid for any other reason whatsoever."

The upshot was an extraordinary and unprecedented strengthening of executive power—untrammeled by judicial scrutiny—and a gargantuan abuse of authority. Some 35,000 people were imprisoned under MISA and another 76,000 under the Defence of India Rules. Soon after MISA was amended, the prime minister wrote to chief ministers in July 1975 that "this power ought to be exercised very sparingly and with greatest care." She urged them "to personally look into all cases . . . all detentions thereunder should only be made if approved by you or, if necessary, by a Ministerial Committee appointed by you." This was purely for the record. In fact, only a paltry number of detention orders under MISA were struck down by the state governments. Uttar Pradesh, which topped the tally with 7,000 detenus, also had the distinction of not striking down a single order.[41]

The sweeping powers of arrest and detention were used against prominent leaders of the opposition and their associates—including Jayaprakash Narayan, Morarji Desai, Jyoti Basu, L.K. Advani, and Raj Narain—as well as leaders and cadres of the organizations that were now banned: the RSS, Ananda Marg, Jamiat-e-Islami, and the Maoist CPI (Marxist-Leninist). Dissidents within the Congress were also swept in—Chandra Shekhar, Mohan Dharia, and Ram Dhan—as were prominent student leaders and trade unionists. However, a majority of those arrested were criminals and "anti-social elements." Of the 35,000 detained under MISA, around 13,000 were those with links—real or alleged—to political parties and the banned outfits.

The conditions in the overcrowded prisons were abysmal; collective punishment of inmates and torture were routine. But none of this was reported, for the press was thoroughly gagged. Indeed, control of the information order was a central objective of the Emergency. The night before the presidential proclamation, power supply was stopped to newspaper presses in Delhi. The following evening, the cabinet decided to impose press censorship under Rule 48 of the Defence of India Rules. The guidelines issued by the chief censor went well beyond the provisions

of Rule 48—and these were regularly updated to plug any workarounds used by the newspapers.

A few senior journalists sought to petition the government to relax the rigors of censorship. In September 1975, Khushwant Singh—editor of the *Illustrated Weekly of India*—met the prime minister and Secretary Dhar. The latter told him that if some senior editors could quietly work out a scheme, he might be able to help. Singh lit upon the idea for a voluntary "Code of Responsible Journalism." After sounding out a few colleagues, he came up with broad principles for a code that could be adopted by the press in exchange for removal of censorship. These included no encouragement by publicity of acts of protest such as *bandhs*, or rallies aimed at undermining the functioning of governments; no incitement to violence or support for demands for dissolution of parliament or legislatures; upholding the dignity of offices of the president, the prime minister, and so on; no exaggerated reporting on the importance of leaders and parties of the opposition; no publication of any accusation against a person's integrity unless the matter was with the police or the courts; and maintaining the highest standards of accuracy and objectivity. However, none of this should detract from the newspapers' right to criticize laws passed by the parliament or the state legislatures, nor the ability to report on their proceedings, as well as those of the courts.

The prime minister's information advisor, H.Y. Sharada Prasad, buried the idea. Describing Singh as an "ebullient iconoclast," he wrote, "Apart from censorship having been relaxed, journalists have become reconciled to it. A few, who seek Government's favour, are even enthusiastic in their protestations of obedience." Singh's idea appeared "outwardly reasonable," but it had "no sanction." The Press Council, the autonomous watchdog of the press, already had a code. The "real remedy," he argued, was to draw up "a new law to ban false and anti-national statements and writings." Thereafter, the machinery of censorship could be dismantled. The prime minister agreed.[42]

Sharada Prasad was among the prime minister's men who were evidently anguished by the Emergency. Nightly, they may have felt the pangs of conscience; but, by day, they exerted themselves intelligently to advance the regime's aims. In the event, the Press Council was

abolished in December 1975, and the publication of "objectionable material"—a capacious category—was proscribed. The government explicitly debarred citizens from approaching the courts to protect freedom of speech and other freedoms in Article 19 of the constitution. Significantly, almost every petition moved before the courts by newspapers and journalists was upheld and the government's actions described as arbitrary.

The Bombay high court struck down the state government's appeal against a clutch of adverse verdicts, stating that the censor could not "exercise his statutory powers to force public opinion in a single mould or to turn the Press into an instrument of brainwashing the public." The Gujarat high court was withering in its criticism: "The Chief Censor's guidelines, in our opinion, are thoroughly useless and worthless because the nation . . . cannot be apron-stringed to the Chief Censor." The court further ruled that "the Censor has no jurisdiction to censor Court proceedings . . . The Censor is not above the court." And yet, the government brazenly censored any reportage of this verdict, as well as others.[43]

Courts apart, reporting on proceedings of the parliament was also censored from the outset. Editors and publishers were deprived of immunity from civil and criminal proceedings when covering parliamentary affairs. Ahead of the parliament's session in January 1976, mandatory censorship was imposed on all news relating to the parliament and a censor room set up in Parliament House. What is more, all reporting on any parliamentary discussion pertaining to censorship was explicitly disallowed.

Indira Gandhi needed the parliament to maintain the façade of democracy. Indeed, the proclamation of Emergency and all subsequent orders and laws were ratified and adopted by both the houses. This was hardly surprising, given the Congress's commanding majority and the silencing of critics within the party. Yet in her endeavor to obtain parliamentary imprimatur, she was unwittingly helped by opposition MPs. Although many of their senior colleagues and associates were in jail, those who had avoided the dragnet were reluctant to resign and continued to attend the parliament, so lending a modicum of legitimacy to the regime. Indeed, Indira Gandhi used the parliament to pass

a law extending its own tenure, which was due to end in March 1976, by a year.

With her party, the parliament, and the press in a vice-like grip, Indira Gandhi encased her position against any challenge. Since this had been her immediate motivation for imposing the Emergency, it ranked high in priority. On 22 July 1975, the government tabled the Thirty-eighth Amendment to the constitution. This barred judicial review of proclamations of emergency (including overlapping proclamations), and of ordinances promulgated and laws enacted during emergencies, which might go against the fundamental rights in the constitution.

Two weeks later, the Thirty-ninth Amendment was introduced, and it was adopted the same day. This was intended to preempt the supreme court's imminent hearing of Indira Gandhi's appeal in the election case. Law Minister Gokhale thought that the Allahabad high court's judgment could be upheld and that hence the only way out was to change the law. The prime minister was "very insistent" that this be done.[44] This amendment inserted a new article (329A) in the constitution, which held that the election of the prime minister (and speaker of the Lok Sabha) could be decided only by a statutory body established by the parliament—not by the supreme court. All prior laws and judicial pronouncements about election petitions were now invalid. Besides, an election petition would be voided if the MP became prime minister (or speaker of the Lok Sabha). To ensure that these moves could not be challenged by the supreme court, the amendment moved all the laws dealing with elections to the Ninth Schedule of the constitution, so placing them beyond judicial review.

Two days later, the Forty-first Amendment bill was introduced in the Rajya Sabha. This debarred any criminal proceedings against the prime minister, the president, or a governor for acts done before or in office. The Rajya Sabha passed the bill the same day, but it was not rammed through the Lok Sabha. The amendment was evidently a shot across the bow aimed at the supreme court, which was going to hear Indira Gandhi's appeal in two days. The Thirty-eighth Amendment had already secured her case, but her insecurities had not fully been allayed. Thus, she also prevailed upon P.N. Haksar to suborn the judges

dealing with her case individually—a disgraceful assignment that Haksar dutifully undertook out of misplaced loyalty. Unsurprisingly, the chief censor issued specific guidelines to the press on what aspects of the case could be covered.[45] She need not have worried. On 7 November 1975, the supreme court bench led by Chief Justice A.N. Ray upheld by a majority of five to four her election in 1971. In so doing, the court accepted the claim that laws could retrospectively be amended to render legal actions that had hitherto violated the law. Here it went by the precedent of two earlier cases where the supreme court had held that election laws could be amended with retrospective effect. The court, however, struck down the provision in Article 329A for protecting the elections of the prime minister and the speaker—largely on the grounds that it violated some aspects of the "basic structure" of the constitution.

It was no secret that the government detested the basic structure doctrine. Chief Justice Ray, we may recall, had gone with the government's views on bank nationalization, the privy purses, and Kesavananda Bharati cases. During the election case, he had quizzed the senior counsel at some length about the idea of basic structure.[46] While this case was being heard, he had responded to a submission from the government to hear several writ petitions pertaining to this doctrine. On 10 November 1975, three days after the court had upheld the basic structure doctrine, the chief justice constituted a thirteen-judge bench to hear arguments on whether or not this doctrine restricted parliament's power to amend the constitution.

The attorney general claimed that the doctrine had resulted in much confusion and had rendered impossible the government's pursuit of social and economic policies. Justice H.R. Khanna bluntly said that this was "utter fallacy": his ruling in Kesavananda had explicitly stated that the right to property was not included in the basic structure of the constitution. Palkhivala argued against a review of Kesavananda, citing the Forty-first Amendment bill as an example of the dangers that lurked in overturning the basic structure doctrine. Justice Khanna would later observe that "the height of eloquence to which Palkhivala rose on that day had seldom been equalled and never surpassed."[47] Palkhivala had also written to the prime minister appealing at once to her good sense

and her vanity: "a free democracy and the unity and integrity of the country will vanish within a few years if the basic structure were overturned, and who, after you, will be able to hold the country together?"[48] It transpired during the hearing that there was no specific request for review from anyone. Scenting unease among his colleagues, the chief justice dissolved the bench.

On matters of more immediate and graver concern to the government, the supreme court practically caved in. This pertained to the writ petitions challenging the detention of some political leaders under MISA. The government had responded that these petitions were nugatory, for the right to move the courts under Article 21—"No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law"—had been suspended by a presidential order. Nine high courts had rejected this objection and directed that the petitions be heard on their merits. A bench of the supreme court led by Chief Justice Ray and including the four senior-most judges—H.R. Khanna, M.H. Beg, Y.V. Chandrachud, and P.N. Bhagwati—began hearings in December 1975 and handed down its judgment in April 1976. They ruled four to one, upholding the government's stance. In light of the presidential order, citizens had no right to move a writ of *habeas corpus*, nor to challenge the detention as illegal or *mala fide*. The amendments to MISA were also declared constitutionally valid.

The lone dissenting judgment came from Justice Khanna. During the hearings, Khanna had observed that Article 21 related not merely to personal liberty but to life. He asked the attorney general if there would be a legal remedy should a police officer kill a man owing to personal enmity. The government's senior-most law officer blandly replied, "there would be no judicial remedy in such a case as long as the Emergency lasts."[49] Khanna's dissent noted that judges could scrutinize the executive's acts despite the presidential order. Article 21 was not the only repository of life and liberty; other statutes pertaining to these could be enforced even when this article was suspended. The high courts had wider jurisdiction than the majority judgment assumed. After all, Article 226, empowering them to issue writs, was an integral part of the constitution. On the argument that there was no negation of the rule of law because the orders were issued under emergency

provisions of the constitution, Justice Khanna wrote: "the illusion of the rule of law was not the same as the reality of the rule of law."[50] Khanna's was a voice in the wilderness. By his own account, he wrote the dissent for posterity. And he had to pay the price for it. In January 1977, Indira Gandhi superseded him and appointed M.H. Beg as the chief justice.

Chandrachud and Bhagwati, who had earlier been vocal about civil liberties and human rights, would later claim that they wanted above all to protect the judiciary.[51] Their stance had the opposite effect, for the majority judgment merely confirmed the structural change in the political system: the balance of power had tilted steeply and decisively towards the executive. Within weeks, the prime minister struck a blow at the judiciary by ordering the transfers of high court judges who had ruled against the government in cases of preventive detention. To be sure, high court judges had been transferred in the past, but always with their consent and the chief justice of India's concurrence.

Earlier in the year, Indira Gandhi had refused to extend the tenures of two judges in the Bombay and Delhi high courts—despite the favorable recommendation of the chief justices and Law Minister Gokhale. In the case of Justice U.R. Lalit of the Bombay high court, she had written in her own hand: "I do <u>not</u> approve of giving him another term," underlining the "not."[52] Now, she ordered the transfer of sixteen high court judges—over their objection—to other states. The list of judges was drawn up with the help of Sanjay Gandhi, who had spoken to several chief ministers. Chief Justice Ray was effectively served an ultimatum: sign the transfers or resign.[53] The prime minister reigned supreme.

8

EMERGENCY

Five days after she had declared the Emergency, Indira Gandhi took to the airwaves again. The Emergency, she said, gave her government "a new opportunity to go ahead with our economic tasks." She proceeded to unveil a lengthy list of policies that was soon dubbed the "20-point programme." This spaghetti bowl of ideas was hastily concocted and seasoned with suggestions from diverse sources, including old advisors like P.N. Haksar and political allies such as the CPI.[1] This new program was, in important ways, continuous with the economic policies that had been pursued prior to 26 June 1975. For a start, there was renewed emphasis on conservative macroeconomic policy to tame inflation and a liberalizing industrial policy of reducing controls and regulations. "The first and foremost challenge," the prime minister declared, was to control inflation and ensure that the foreign exchange reserves remained strong. She went on to admit that the licensing regime had "come in the way of new investment, causing delay. These will be simplified." Limits on the investments of those industries that needed neither imports nor government financing would be raised.[2]

The second major objective was amelioration of poverty by targeted programs, especially for the rural poor: landless laborers, artisans, and small and marginal farmers. These included steps to "liquidate rural indebtedness" and provide institutional credit to the poor, starting with a moratorium on repayment; legislation to enhance the rural minimum wage; provision of rural housing; and, above all, the implementation of

land reforms and distribution of surplus land among the landless "with redoubled zeal." All this was held out as potential benefits of the spell of dictatorship that she had inaugurated. Warning the people not to expect "magic remedies and dramatic results," she declared that poverty could only be eliminated by "hard work sustained by clear vision, iron will and the strictest discipline." Indeed, official propaganda would cast the Emergency as a tonic "era of discipline."[3]

Given the government's desire to keep prices under control, monetary policy remained conservative during the Emergency. In early October 1975, the RBI told the finance minister that monetary expansion could not be curbed without sharply curtailing bank credit to the government and businesses. The minister did not demur. Although the industry minister, T.A. Pai, remained irate at the persistence of high interest rates, the government refused to lean on the bank. To be sure, when it suited the government, it was more than willing to lay down the law. In order to check the price of raw cotton, for instance, the finance ministry directed the RBI "to examine the matter on a most urgent basis for such action as it considered appropriate in the direction of tightening credit against cotton."[4] Monetary policy apart, the improved balance of payments and an excellent harvest in 1975–76 ensured that inflation remained well under control during the Emergency.[5]

The drift towards loosening economic controls and allowing industrial houses to expand was also evident. This pro-business tilt may have been temperamentally uncongenial to Indira Gandhi, but the economic context ensured that she moved steadily in that direction. A fascinating exchange of letters between Indira Gandhi and her cousin, the economic mandarin and diplomat B.K. Nehru, sheds light on this important shift.

Writing to him in December 1974, Indira Gandhi observed that "solely profit motivated functioning is harmful and our industrialists even reduce production in order to get higher profits." Indeed, the Pugwash group of economists had recently said that "in the present conditions there can be no economic growth which ignores social justice."[6] Nehru replied that India had adopted "Anti-production policies – in the quest for 'social justice'." He urged her to embrace the

slogan of " 'Utpadan Barhao' [increase production] instead of 'Garibi Hatao' [remove poverty]." The present crisis and discontent in India stemmed from an irony of history:

> in our attempt to create "social justice" through laws, regulations, controls, quotas, licenses and permits what we have succeeded in doing is really to establish unadulterated 19th century capitalism without simultaneously permitting it to increase production . . . Does "social justice" mean equality in poverty or growth in the size of the national cake which may continue to be divided in unequal portions – if necessary?

All other objectives, he insisted, should be "subordinated to this one objective of increased production."[7]

Indira Gandhi replied that she "did not intend to pick a quarrel or begin an argument" and that she was "slightly annoyed." Nevertheless, she asked him to "give concrete suggestions for 'Utpadan barhao'."[8] In response, B.K. Nehru wrote that "Harmful, cumbersome physical controls must be abolished and not [merely] streamlined . . . Only industrialists, traders, politicians and administration benefit from controls not the consumer." Further, he asked her to avoid focusing solely on welfare programs. "Employment and not subsidy or charity is the answer to poverty and employment is generated by increasing production." He also suggested greater involvement of industry and business leaders in the government's economic committees and reforming the economic administrative system.[9]

Indira Gandhi would neither go so far nor so fast, yet in her speech on the twenty points, she did avow the intent to move towards relaxing the government's hold on the private sector. Indeed, "Utpadan," or production, became a *cri de coeur* of the Emergency regime—culminating in a national convention on productivity in November 1976. More important, a series of changes were made within the extant industrial policy framework. On 12 September 1975, the cabinet committee on economic policy signed off on a slew of recommendations from the ministry of industry.[10] Thereafter, the government continued to tweak the regime based on evidence of its working. Engineering industries were

allowed to change and diversify the mix of their products within the existing licensed capacity. Firms that were able to increase output through modernization, greater efficiency, or rationalization of workflow were allowed to produce more than their approved capacity; fifteen select engineering industries were allowed automatically to enhance their capacity by 25 per cent; licensing was done away with in twenty-four sectors, provided they needed no imports or foreign collaboration.[11] The government also took steps to support export industries, including automatic granting of licenses for importing raw materials and components; provision of finance at concessional rates of interest; and abolition of licensing for nearly 200 of 300 products, and easing of the process for the rest.[12]

These policy measures were complemented by a series of authoritarian steps to "discipline" the organized working class. This turn had been heralded by the brutal suppression of the railway strike in 1974. The larger labor unions affiliated with the Congress and the Socialist Party met the prime minister on 5 July 1975 and expressed their full support for the declaration of emergency. Their residual attempts at peaceful protests against the suppression of democracy lost steam by the end of the year.[13] Other trade unions soon felt the edge of the regime's rapier. As P.N. Dhar briskly noted, "we should invoke DIR [Defence of India Rules] against strikes or lock outs over issues such as scale of pays and allowances, bonus and other conditions of service."[14]

Some 2,000 union leaders and members were incarcerated and strikes proscribed. Across the board, bonuses were sliced and benefits trimmed. Protests against these measures were smashed by the hammerblows of the state.[15] Workdays lost due to stoppages and strikes declined from 40.3 million in 1974 to 21.9 million in 1975, before plunging to 12.8 million in 1976.[16] The government also made it easier for industries to lay off workers in the event of a shortfall of raw materials or power, removing the need for prior approval from state-level committees. "We shall only hasten the process of liquidation of the industrial units," Dhar argued, "if even in such cases, we do not permit lay offs."[17]

As the growth rate picked up after four dismal years for the economy, Indian capitalists—for the most part—beamed approvingly. Their doyen, J.R.D. Tata, publicly praised the regime's "refreshingly pragmatic

and result oriented approach," expressing his pleasure at trains running on time and his being able to leave home without fearing "strikes, boycotts and demonstrations." Blather about human rights and freedom was "not in the interests of 600 million people for whom no freedom of rights matters more today than freedom from want and the right to work and earn a decent living."[18] Indian business, it appears, was willing to put at least some of its money where its mouth was, for there was a marked revival in private investment, especially in equipment investment, from the mid-1970s.[19]

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From the outset, Indira Gandhi was aware that the Emergency regime could last only for a time. Then, too, popular acclamation was necessary for any dictator to stay in saddle. Hence, the programs aimed at the poor were a central preoccupation of her government and the bureaucracy. The prime minister took a keen interest in the allocation of rural housing sites to the landless, demanding periodic progress reports from her officials and prodding the chief ministers to do more.[20] Fifteen months into the Emergency, reporting from the states showed considerable progress in allotment. Indira Gandhi was dismayed to learn, however, that facts on the ground hardly comported with official statistics. She sent a peeved missive to the Congress chief ministers, pointing out that she had been told that "in a large proportion of cases actual possession has not been given to the allottees." If true, "the whole purpose of the programme will be defeated." She wanted the chief ministers to inquire into this "urgently" and issue "stringent instructions" to district officers.[21] An informal assessment in September 1976 of the situation in parts of rural Uttar Pradesh pointed out that where possession of land had been given to Dalits and backward castes, not a single house had been constructed. This was either owing to continuing disputes over the land or the lack of funds with the recipients to construct houses.[22]

Progress on rural indebtedness was patchier still. The moratorium on debt had hardly any impact: "Poor peasants continue to pay back their loans in instalments to money-lenders. They feel that only by paying back their instalments at the usual high interest rates will they

be able to obtain further credit from the traditional money lender."[23] Early on, the government fastened on the idea of regional rural banks. The plan was to reach out to "areas which are now starved of credit whether from banks or cooperative societies, cut down the cost of agricultural financing and give the requisite rural orientation to the bank personnel." All this was consonant with the older objectives of rural bank network and credit extension. So, the finance minister convened a group of bankers to draft proposals.[24] In early October 1975, the parliament passed legislation for the creation of regional rural banks. By the end of the Emergency, nineteen such banks had come into existence but had barely got their act together. As a review in December 1976 noted, they had cumulatively mobilized deposits of Rs. 6.6 million and provided loans to small and marginal farmers of Rs. 5.7 million.[25] Not an impressive figure even by the unexacting standards of impoverished rural India.

An underlying problem shared by both these programs was their all but exclusive dependence on the bureaucratic apparatus for policy formulation, implementation, and monitoring. State and local governments, in particular, struggled to keep up with the volume of reporting expected on the progress or lack thereof on the twenty points. The most challenging of these was the implementation of land ceilings enacted by state legislatures and subsequent redistribution of surplus land. Because this entailed a deeper intervention into local relations of power in rural India—relations in which the political class was thoroughly enmeshed—state bureaucracies had failed dismally in enforcing land laws. Under the Emergency regime, the coercive power of the state was dramatically enhanced, but not enough to make a significant dent in land redistribution.

Given the historical experience of faltering land reforms, Indira Gandhi and her advisors knew that the bureaucracy by itself could not deliver results. So, the Congress leadership was called on deck. But the party now bore only a flickering resemblance to its former self. It had long since deteriorated into an electoral machine with little capacity for any other form of organized political work. This was evident in the flannel and flummery at the two-day conference on land reforms held in August 1976. The Congress president, D.K. Barooah, urged party

members to set an example by declaring their land assets: "if Congressmen give the lead, people of India will accept it." The agriculture minister, Jagjivan Ram, wanted deputations of Congress leaders to "visit the villages and find out who are the people who possess more than the ceiling limit and persuade them to part with the surplus land."[26] The persuasive powers of the Congress party were evidently better than the coercive power of the state.

Even in conjunction, they did not add up to much. By the end of December 1976, only 1.7 million acres had been taken over by the government, of which nearly 1.1 million acres were redistributed. This was an improvement on the measly 62,000 acres acquired during 1972–75.[27] Then, too, in the largest state, Uttar Pradesh, most of the land redistributed was not the excess held by landlords: "It is mostly Panchayat or common land of the village. Much of it is without irrigation facility and unproductive. This distribution has been done to fulfill the targets of the 20-point programme on paper."[28]

The coercive visage of the Emergency was starkest in two areas that were not listed in the twenty points: population control and slum clearance. The regime garnered notoriety and opprobrium for its population control drive. The question of population, we may recall, was regarded as entwined with the problem of poverty. Unsurprisingly, the family planners drooled in delight at the opportunity presented by the Emergency and its avowed commitment to reducing poverty. When the minister for health and family planning, Karan Singh, had taken charge eighteen months earlier, he had promptly told the prime minister that "with regard to Family Planning, there does not seem to be the sense of urgency in the nation that it so obviously demands." He had also been concerned that the Planning Commission's estimates on fertility rates were rather optimistic. The fifth five-year plan aimed at reducing the birth rate to 25 per 1,000 by 1981. Karan Singh felt that at best they could pull it down to 30 per 1,000.[29]

When the Emergency was proclaimed, the health minister had a gleam in his eye. Speaking in the parliament in August 1975, he said that family planning was not among the twenty points because "it was too important to be listed as one of the points." Indeed, it was "to help fight poverty that family planning becomes extremely important."[30]

Weeks later, he wrote to Indira Gandhi: "The problem is now so serious that there seems no alternative but to think in terms of introduction of some element of compulsion in the larger national interest." After disavowing compulsion—for the record—he recommended "a judicious and carefully selected mixture of incentives and disincentives." The Emergency and the twenty-point program had "provided an appropriate atmosphere for tackling the problem." The prime minister wholly agreed. As she stated in a conference in January 1976, "We must now act decisively and bring down the birth rate speedily . . . We should not hesitate to take steps which might be described as drastic. Some personal rights have to be kept in abeyance, for the human rights of the nation."[31] What ensued was not a decisive break from past practices but a dramatic intensification of many aspects of earlier efforts at population control: the emphasis on sterilization, material incentives, and bureaucratic pressure—now in a climate of political and legal impunity.

Thus, the national population policy announced in April 1976 contained new targets and incentives for those willing to undergo sterilization; greater incentives for doctors and health workers; provision for states to enact laws for compulsory sterilization; and tying central government aid to states with their performance on population policy. Quantification of targets enabled the mobilization of bureaucratic power on vertical and lateral axes. The former worked by devolution of the state's targets down to districts, blocks, primary health centers, and so on. The latter worked by roping in other departments of the state government—education, police, and revenue—to assist the health bureaucracy. The system functioned by the extensive and punitive use of institutionalized sanctions against its *own personnel* for failing to meet targets.[32] It worked even better than its progenitors may have imagined. In 1975–76, the sterilization target of 2.48 million was marginally exceeded, at 2.62 million. In 1976–77, the target of 4.25 million paled in comparison to the accomplishment of 8.13 million sterilizations.[33] This was well beyond the ken of the sorcerer's apprentices who had originally fabricated the population control machinery.

The demolition of slums was undertaken principally in Delhi, though it was attempted to a considerably lesser extent in Bombay and some towns of Uttar Pradesh. Urbanization had featured in the union government's

thinking since early 1972, mainly as a question of imposing limits on urban property holdings. This, too, was a project of nationalization. As Haksar explained to Indira Gandhi, "There should be no private ownership of land in urban areas. Existing freehold rights should be converted into leaseholds and where people have acquired large plots of land, they should be made to disgorge this land in the wider interests of the urban community as a whole." This was regarded as essential for planned urbanization as a concomitant to industrialization of the country. The main features of the industrial city in this conception included "sewage, water supply, electricity, roads, public transport, prevention of slums, slum clearance, housing, recreational facilities, parks etc." Dwellings of the urban poor were evidently an undesirable feature. Be that as it may, during the Emergency the government enacted a law on urban land ceiling and regulation, which went a considerable distance towards Haksar's idea of nationalization but proved difficult to implement.

Sociologists in the ministry of works and housing observed that population in cities had risen twice as fast as the overall population growth. This was a consequence of an accelerating rate of migration from rural India. Because the cities were incapable of coping with such numbers, there was a "mushrooming of squatter settlements on pockets of available open land" near places of work. "However unwelcome such settlements are from the planners' points of view," they argued, "they are a stark reality." Fieldwork in the slums of Delhi showed that they provided "acceptable shelter" and compensated for inadequacy of housing for the poor. What is more, the squatters had "been able to achieve a stable social system amongst themselves at high densities in environments that are highly degraded."[34] The planners insisted, however, that slums must be done away with and their denizens shifted to "low-cost settlements supported with all necessary physical facilities, social services and community facilities."[35]

The most zealous partisan of the planners' cause was the vice chairman of the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), Jagmohan Malhotra. In his long career with the DDA, Jagmohan (he went by his first name) developed a reputation for demonic energy, abrasive style, and blinkered judgment. He did not care, he wrote later, if "my efforts have made me unpopular." Had Baron Haussmann, prefect of Paris in the mid-nineteenth

century, not cleared the city of slums, "Paris would have been today an ugly and despicable town."[36] His dream was to rebuild Shahjahanabad, the walled city of old Delhi, constructed under Emperor Shahjahan. The walled city was now "sick, shattered, dismembered . . . a symbol of national shame and diffidence." It could be restored to its past beauty and cultural glory, if the government had the "courage to eliminate what is cruel and clumsy." This effort at rebuilding, he added with characteristic immodesty, should "not be viewed in isolation but in the overall context of the need to rebuild India."[37]

The poor who clung to those parts were, alas, refractory folk who refused to follow the pied piper. The Emergency came as the perfect opportunity to eject them neck and crop. From July 1976 to December 1977, nearly 120,000 slums and other structures were bulldozed into rubble. Their 700,000 residents were dumped in the new "resettlement colonies" at the margins of the city, far away from their work and livelihood. The promised land of houses and schools, parks and roads, water and electricity was securely stapled in the musty files of the municipal planners. The most egregious instance of slum demolition occurred in the vicinity of Turkman Gate. Most of the residents in this area were Muslims, who were also the target of an overbearing campaign of sterilization. Their farrago of resentments culminated in an attempt at resisting the operation of bulldozers in the area. The police opened fire, killing at least six people and arresting over a hundred.

The minister of works and housing, Raghuramaiah, would later deny any knowledge of these occurrences. The DDA was, he would plead, an autonomous body, and the two municipalities did not come under his ministry. As for legality, "when Prime Minister herself is in charge of it, what can a poor Minister like me do?"[38] The prime minister apart, her younger son Sanjay Gandhi was a moving spirit behind this drive to "clean up" the city. Given the interest in the highest reaches of the regime, there developed between the DDA and the municipal authorities "a great deal of competitiveness" to get an upper hand in demolitions.[39] All this was possible only because no citizen could move the courts for enforcement of their fundamental rights.

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Not content with excising rights guaranteed by the constitution, the Emergency regime also contemplated far-reaching constitutional changes. Dictatorships, it has been argued, can be "commissarial" or "sovereign." A commissarial dictatorship seeks to defend the existing constitutional order by suspending normal laws. A sovereign dictatorship, by contrast, seeks—in the name of the people—to establish a new constitutional order.[40] Indira Gandhi imposed the Emergency claiming the former, but she gradually began moving towards the latter. The underlying impulse was to cement the dominance of the executive and to institutionalize her Caesarism. The vehicle for both was the idea of a directly elected executive presidency. As it happened, she did not go all the way there; but she did succeed in molesting the constitution.

Three distinct impulses prodded the prime minister to consider deeper changes to the constitution. The first came from sycophantic partymen who believed, after the Allahabad high court judgment, that the judiciary must be cut to size. The second came from individuals in the government and the party who had wanted all along to roll back judicial restraints on the parliament's powers to amend the constitution. And the third came from bureaucratic advisors with considerable governmental experience. As early as mid-August 1975 there was vague talk of taking a second look at the constitution. Asked what changes she was contemplating, Indira Gandhi said, "I am not thinking in terms of a Constituent Assembly or a new Constitution. A second look does not mean an alternative Constitution." Yet she also felt that "we can and should have a look at the provisions and procedures we have."[41]

This reflected the thinking of such seasoned bureaucrats as the ambassador to the United States, T.N. Kaul. He advised adopting "the Committee System so that the Parliament meets only for the Budget and Winter sessions, for a month or so each time, and for the rest of the year, various Committees could meet from time to time." This, he felt, "need not involve an amendment of the Constitution and even if it does, it is worth considering now, when you can get it through."[42] The same idea was independently suggested by the secretary-general of the Lok Sabha, S.L. Shakdher, to the prime minister's secretary, P.N. Dhar.[43]

Proposals for more extensive and far-reaching changes came from B.K. Nehru. He firmly believed that Indira Gandhi had done the right

thing by imposing the Emergency. He regarded the stance and actions of Jayaprakash Narayan and Morarji Desai (with whom he had a long association) as utterly inappropriate. "My defence of the Emergency was vigorous," he would later write, "not only because it was my duty as Indian High Commissioner [in London] to defend it but also because I wholeheartedly approved of it."[44] In early September 1975, he wrote to the prime minister, lauding the Emergency as a "tour de force of immense courage and power produced by popular support." By taking this difficult decision, she had "arrested the rapidly increasing drift to disaster." The immediate crisis having passed, he advised her to "institutionalise the Revolution you have initiated."[45]

Nehru felt that democratic institutions on the British model had "not been able to provide the answer to our needs." In this system, the executive was continuously dependent on the support of an elected legislature "which is looking for popularity and stops any unpleasant measures." The Emergency "should be taken advantage of while it lasts," he argued, to install "a strong executive at the centre capable of taking tough, unpleasant and unpopular decisions."[46] The model he had in mind was the French Fifth Republic. Inaugurated in October 1958, this had been the outcome of Charles de Gaulle's ascension to power—by coup d'état—in May 1958 against the backdrop of a crisis-ridden Fourth Republic and his decision to create a new constitutional order that was ratified by a referendum.[47]

Drawing on the Gaullist model, Nehru suggested a directly elected president of the republic. However, unlike in France, the president should have only a single, seven-year term. Parliament should be elected on a system of proportional representation (not the English first-past-the-post system)—as should state legislatures. Members of parliament (and the state legislatures) could not become ministers in the government. The governor in states would also hold office for a single term and be a "de facto agent of the Centre."[48]

As for the judiciary, he advocated "American practice"—presumably appointing supreme court justices for life. And yet he wanted to limit the scope of prerogative writs. He also asked the prime minister to examine the "possibility of making fundamental rights non-justiciable." To strengthen rule of law, he suggested increasing the number of lower

courts and specialized tribunals. Turning to the press, he observed that there was "no reason why, like many other countries, we should not have a Press Law to make the press responsible." Further, he advised Indira Gandhi to "strengthen greatly" the existing libel laws: "define more closely what is meant by bringing Government into contempt and hatred, and make it an offence to publish unproved statements without taking sufficient steps to be satisfied about their truth."

Nehru suggested appointing three commissions—on the constitution, the judiciary, and the press—to report in four months. Parliament could discuss their recommendations in the summer. She could then dissolve the parliament and hold elections in the autumn of 1976. Nehru did not envisage a French-style referendum on the new constitution: after all, there had been none on the original constitution of 1950. In closing, he urged the prime minister to "Make these fundamental changes in the Constitution now when you have 2/3 majority." He was admittedly suggesting bold action, but "far less bold than you have taken more than once before."

Nehru's ideas were received with rapture by the prime minister's secretary, P.N. Dhar. He discussed them in depth with Nehru when the latter visited India in winter 1975. Dhar felt that these proposals attractively combined the pursuit of several key objectives: stability of the central and state governments; improving the quality of ministers; ensuring the executive was strong enough to take unpopular measures for development; and reestablishing the rule of law. He discussed these ideas at length with the prime minister and urged serious consideration.[49] Indira Gandhi was well aware of the Gaullist constitution and the background to its introduction. "A chaotic state of affairs," she would later write, "similar to that in India prevailed in France when de Gaulle came to power in 1958." His major response was constitutional reform and the introduction of Article 16 in the new constitution, which gave the president sweeping emergency powers. This, she would claim, "goes a long way to show how it became necessary for my government to resort to the emergency provisions in the Constitution if India were to pull herself out of the impending disaster."[50]

Indeed, Article 16 of the French constitution had been adopted at the express demand of de Gaulle. Indira Gandhi was canny in invoking

it and drawing a parallel with the French situation in May 1958, though she conveniently passed over the question of the legality of de Gaulle's assumption of power. She may well have hoped that a similar veil of historical rationalization would be cast on her coup d'état of June 1975.[51] Unlike de Gaulle, though, Indira Gandhi was reluctant to transition swiftly from a commissarial to a constitutional dictatorship. Thus, when Nehru asked if he could discuss these ideas with her party leaders, she gave him the go-ahead but said "very clearly and emphatically" that he should not convey the impression that they had the stamp of her approval.

So beholden was the party to the prime minister that when Nehru met senior congressmen—Jagjivan Ram, Swaran Singh, and Y.B. Chavan—they readily agreed to support these changes if she wanted them. Nehru also met H.M. Patel of the BLD—an erstwhile senior colleague of his from the Indian Civil Service. His reaction, very like that of other bureaucrats, was "enthusiastically favourable." Nehru then met and sounded out the only two non-Congress chief ministers in the country. M. Karunanidhi of Tamil Nadu was unimpressed. It was evident to him that Indira Gandhi would be the first president. By contrast, Babubhai Patel of Gujarat bubbled with enthusiasm: "there could be nothing more suited to Indian conditions" than such a constitution. The Congress chief minister of Punjab (later president of India), Zail Singh, said that whatever Indira Gandhi wanted was fine by him. The chief minister of Haryana, who was close to Sanjay Gandhi, was blunter still: "get rid of all this election nonsense. If you ask me just make our sister President for life and there's no need to do anything else." When Nehru reported back to Indira Gandhi, she remained noncommittal.[52]

In the event, the prime minister passed on Nehru's letter to the troika of advisors to whom she had turned in the past: party president D.K. Barooah, Bengal chief minister S.S. Ray, and party treasurer Rajni Patel. The last approached another congressman from Bombay, A.R. Antulay, who had previously authored a pamphlet refuting the government's critics on the supersession of supreme court judges. The outcome of their confabulations was a shoddy paper titled "A Fresh Look at our Constitution: Some Suggestions."[53]

"The present system of government," it began, "has not come up to the expectation of the common man of the country." Drawing on American, French, and other European practices, it proposed a presidential system. The president would be the chief executive of the nation, directly elected for a six-year term. Unlike Nehru's proposal, it gave no specified limit on the number of terms in office. "Since our President is thus elected by popular mandate," the paper maintained, "he should . . . enjoy more authority and powers than even U.S.A. President." This was precisely what the paper proceeded to suggest. Half of the council of ministers appointed by the president would be members of parliament, hence "unlike the U.S.A. the legislature will not be too independent of the executive."

The president would exercise more sweeping powers over the judiciary. The president would appoint all judges in consultation with the council of ministers or the state governments. A "Superior Council of Judiciary" would be chaired by the president with the chief justice of India and the law minister as vice chairpersons. Members of the council would include two high court and supreme court judges, four members of parliament, and four nominees of the president. Apart from deciding "administrative matters pertaining to the judiciary," this council would be "the authority to interpret laws and the Constitution; as also to determine the validity of legislation." In rendering the constitutional courts toothless, the document cited such shining examples of constitutional democracy as Greece and Guatemala.

The prime minister passed on a copy of this confidential document to Dhar, who recognized that it "twisted the constitution in an unambiguously authoritarian direction."[54] Barooah overreached himself when, in a bid to test the waters, he leaked the document. The reaction was almost uniformly critical, leading Indira Gandhi to distance herself from its contents. To limit the fallout from this fiasco, Barooah got the Congress's annual session in December 1975 to adopt a resolution that "our Constitution be thoroughly re-examined in order to ascertain if the time has not come to make adequate alterations to it so that it may continue as a living document."

Moving the resolution, Ray declared that the Emergency was "fully justified morally, justified constitutionally and justified politically . . .

[it] should and must continue until the situation changed." Meanwhile, it was time to have "a second look" at the constitution "so that social progress could not be halted and so that the national economy could march ahead without any obstructions." The prime minister was more circumspect: "May be amendment of the Constitution is not required. Some changes in the rules might be enough. The question should be debated." In the subsequent discussion, Ray sought to contain disquiet in the party about the leaked document, mollifying the malcontents and asking them to "not pay any heed to such pamphlets being circulated anonymously." He dismissed all suggestions about "a Presidential form of Government, one party-rule and sweeping changes in the judicial system." Their constitutional focus was limited: "Parliament was a supreme body of the elected representatives of the people and so courts could not be allowed to act as third chamber."[55] Concerns about the basic structure doctrine and parliament's power to amend the constitution were yet again to the fore—a development that was undoubtedly influenced by the supreme court's unwillingness to review Kesavananda Bharati.

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In late February 1976, Barooah appointed a committee "to study the question of amendment of the constitution." Led by Swaran Singh, the committee consisted of eleven members, including Ray, Patel, Gokhale, and Antulay. The committee's proposals were discussed by the AICC towards the end of May. Moving the resolution on "Amendment of the Constitution of India," Swaran Singh said that "the Congress wants to place beyond doubt Parliament's sole authority to amend the Constitution." The courts had "doubted the supremacy of Parliament saying that certain things could not be changed because they were 'basic'." Hence, the committee was recommending that "Constitutional amendments made by Parliament could not be challenged in courts."

Furthermore, laws passed by the parliament or the state legislatures could not be ruled unconstitutional by the high courts and the supreme court without a minimum bench of five and seven judges as well as a supermajority of two-thirds of the bench. Legislation passed by the parliament or state assemblies in pursuit of the directive principles in

the constitution could not legally be challenged by invoking any other provisions, including fundamental rights. The hierarchy between fundamental rights and directive principles would be upended. "This is very essential," Singh insisted, "We must have it." Another, "minor matter" was the central government's ability to "help" the states in the event of a grave law-and-order situation. To enhance this, the former must be able to deploy central forces under its own control in any state—though the states should be consulted before so doing. The rest of the proposed amendments were administrative and political: inserting the words "socialist" and "secular" in the preamble, and adding "fundamental duties."

Seconding the resolution, Ray argued that the basic structure was a newfangled doctrine: "there was nothing called basic structure in any Constitution and nobody knew about it." He could not understand why fundamental rights could not be amended, for "they were not constant anywhere in the world." The prime minister took a different tack, blithely insisting that the proposed amendments "would not change the fundamental or basic structure of the Constitution." More pregnant was her claim that by giving the Congress a two-thirds majority in the parliament, the Indian people had given it a mandate to impart a "deeper and purposive" meaning to democracy.

As the committee continued its consultations and deliberations, Ray and Barooah felt that its recommendations were not taking the requisite shape. In a note to the prime minister, they impressed on her that "the gains of the Emergency have to be consolidated and structural changes in the constitution have to be effected to ensure that the government is not prevented through obstruction or subversion from carrying out the mandate of the majority." The pursuit of two objectives was crucial: "to remove as much as possible the fetters" on the prime minister and her government; and "to prevent as much as possible judicial interference" on executive action and laws. Indira Gandhi agreed with these maximalist objectives, directing Ray and Gokhale to press ahead with drafting the amendment.[56] By the time the Swaran Singh committee published its detailed report in mid-August, the constitutional amendment was already drafted.[57] On 1 September 1976, the Forty-second Amendment bill was tabled in the parliament.

The proposed amendment built on the ideas mooted by the committee, but it went considerably further.

In its final shape, the amendment bill had three main objectives. The first was to entrench the imbalance of power between the parliament and the judiciary. Following the Swaran Singh committee, the amendment expanded the constitution's Article 31C such that legislation to implement any of the directive principles could not be challenged in the courts as an infringement of fundamental rights. Apart from requiring supermajorities in constitutional benches to overturn legislation, a new Article 31D was inserted. No law enacted for the prevention or proscription of anti-national activities or associations could be deemed unconstitutional because it abridged the fundamental rights in Articles 14, 19, or 31. Further, high courts could not rule on the constitutionality of central laws. More decisively, the courts could not question constitutional amendments "on any ground." Amendments to fundamental rights were placed beyond judicial review. Lest there be any doubt, "it is hereby declared that there shall be no limitation whatever on the constituent power of Parliament to amend by way of addition, variation or repeal the provisions of this Constitution."

Second, the amendment sought to strengthen the central government's power vis-à-vis the states and fatally impair the federal system. The union government could deploy central armed and paramilitary forces under its own control in any state. The proviso for prior consultation suggested by the committee was dropped. The emergency provisions were amended to allow for the proclamation of an emergency in only a part of the country; for the parliament to make laws for any state, including those not directly placed under emergency rule; and for the adoption of laws and executive action contravening fundamental rights in states not under emergency. Provisions for dismissing an elected state government were strengthened by extending the period of "president's rule" from six months to a year. In all this, the amendment strode far beyond the committee's recommendations.

Finally, the amendment sought further to encase Indira Gandhi's election in 1971 as well as future elections from any legal challenge. Thus, the courts were entirely excluded from election disputes. This had been proposed by the committee, but the amendment imported

more armory. Decisions about disqualification on grounds of corrupt practices would be decided by the president of India or the governor of the state in consultation with the election commission. Harking back to Indira Gandhi's case, it held that courts could not even ask the government to produce its rules of transacting business.

When the amendment bill was introduced in parliament, it ignited a train of criticism within and beyond the house. At least one major newspaper, *Statesman*, carried an editorial saying that "by one sure stroke the amendment tilts the constitutional balance in favour of Parliament." A recently formed organization, People's Union for Civil Liberties and Democratic Rights, held several meetings and published statements scrutinizing the proposed bill. Another outfit, Citizens for Democracy, published a major pamphlet, *Democracy and Constitution*. Its contributing authors included two former judges of the Bombay high court, the chief editor of the *Indian Express*, and E.M.S. Namboodiripad of the CPI (M). Although his party had long been critical of the class character and conservatism of the judiciary, the veteran communist leader now felt impelled to acknowledge that it could be a check on an arbitrary and overweening executive. A public meeting of prominent women, including Maniben Patel, Congress stalwart Vallabhbhai Patel's daughter, sharply censured the move to alter the basic constitutional framework. A seminar convened by erstwhile "Young Turk" Krishan Kant was attended by a former law minister, an attorney general and a solicitor general, and senior politicians, as well as intellectuals who had previously been in the good books of Indira Gandhi, including her father's biographer Sarvepalli Gopal. The seminar issued a "National Consensus Statement" criticizing the bill and demanding its postponement. In parliament, P.G. Mavalankar called the amendment a "Constitution Alteration Exercise . . . a dishonest move." Krishan Kant spoke on behalf of several parties, denouncing the "sinister philosophy . . . that as the interests of the society are superior to the interests of the individual, they are justified in taking away the fundamental rights of individuals."[58]

Despite eloquent criticism, the opposition was too feeble to check the bill's passage in parliament. It sailed through both the houses and thirteen of twenty-two state legislatures. The president signed it into

law on 18 December 1976. The central executive's preponderance of power over the judiciary and the states was etched into the constitution. Politically, however, the situation looked more fluid.

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Part of the reason the prime minister wanted to expedite the Forty-second Amendment was to weed out wilder ideas sprouting in the Congress party. Bansi Lal, former chief minister of Haryana and now the defence minister, told the Swaran Singh committee, "in all seriousness," that they should "recommend lifelong power to Mrs. Gandhi, as the Prime Minister." He was confident that the armed forces would go along with it.[59] Bansi Lal was close to Sanjay Gandhi, and the duo sought to bring political pressure to bear on the committee. On 21 October 1976, Congress legislators and party members in Haryana, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh resolved unanimously in favor of convening a new constituent assembly. The prime minister was taken aback. She decided to stub these moves and hasten the passage of the amendment bill in the parliament.[60]

All the same, the state Congress resolutions underscored Sanjay Gandhi's growing clout within the party. When the Emergency had been proclaimed, his mother had insisted to an old friend: "Sanjay is not in politics." He had helped with the 1971 elections and had been around in the tumultuous days after the Allahabad high court's judgment. Now, he was "taking an interest in our cleanliness campaign."[61] Faced with a party machinery that she had rendered flaccid, Indira Gandhi soon looked to her younger son to impart dynamism and initiative. Sanjay Gandhi, of course, deployed these to destructive effect in the slum demolition and population control programs. It was clear from early 1976 to close advisors like Sharada Prasad that she wanted him to take on an increasingly prominent role.[62] Sanjay Gandhi's power also waxed with the support of officials in the prime minister's house—a sump of intrigue—and the Delhi government, as well as political allies like Bansi Lal. In theory, he was only a member of the national executive of the Youth Congress. This organization had come into its own four years ago in West Bengal during the repression and witch-hunt of Naxalite rebels and their alleged sympathizers. Under Sanjay Gandhi's watch, its leadership was swelled by well-heeled and expensively

educated men, who compensated for their lack of experience with brashness bordering on thuggery. Its rank and file, too, expanded enormously, so imparting a misleading impression of the attractions of the Youth Congress and its leader. Ambika Soni, the president of the Youth Congress, would later concede that the huge influx happened because no other youth organizations could operate during the Emergency and because "those who wanted to protect themselves from the action by police and other authorities joined the Youth Congress."[63]

In July 1976, Sanjay Gandhi had the Youth Congress adopt a "five-point programme": family planning, tree plantation, refusal of bridal dowry for weddings, promoting adult literacy, and abolition of caste. Tellingly, Congress president Barooah instructed all state and local committees that the five-point program and the official twenty-point program "should be taken up together" and that they "should give special attention to this addition."[64] When the Congress held its annual meeting in Guwahati in November 1976, the Youth Congress held a snazzier conclave alongside it, and its president berated the Congress party for apparently obstructing their work. Indira Gandhi reportedly said that the Youth Congress had "stolen our thunder."[65]

Indira Gandhi was looked askance at any criticism of her son's doings—not least by the international press. In the summer of 1976, she wrote to B.K. Nehru spluttering with rage that the British press was "once again on the rampage engaged in scurrilous and vicious attacks on us, and especially Sanjay."[66] Nehru knew better than to respond on this point. For he had been advised some months earlier by Haksar that "it would be the greatest mistake for me to say anything critical in the slightest degree about Sanjay. She was absolutely blind as far as that boy was concerned." Haksar knew whereof he spoke: his aged uncle had been arrested at the younger Gandhi's behest.[67] Of greater concern to Indira Gandhi was the motivation behind the relentlessly negative coverage of her son: "Have they gone stark mad? Is it pent up hatred and bitterness? Or as some say, is this their way of giving encouragement to the new political party about which Jayaprakash has spoken but which has not yet materialised?"[68]

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Immured in guesthouses and hospitals, Jayaprakash Narayan was indeed looking for an exit from the cul-de-sac. As the polar night of the Emergency set in, Narayan realized that he had grievously underestimated Indira Gandhi and her grip over the Congress party. Yet he continued to believe that "popular resistance will grow and gather strength."[69] This hope was swiftly pierced. The "JP movement" crumbled under the heavy artillery of mass arrests and censorship. There was no resistance worth the name. In hindsight, it is clear that the movement had not struck deep roots—even in northern India. Students, by definition a transient social group, went back to their campuses and classrooms, though there was some residual, *sotto voce* posturing. The urban poor had to protect other equities—livelihoods, homes—from the maw of the Emergency regime. Neither organized labor, nor the peasantry, nor yet their farmhands had joined the movement. Its most organized section was the Jana Sangh's leadership and RSS cadres. Incarceration of the former and a ban on the latter effectively decapitated and disembowelled the movement.

RSS supremo Balasaheb Deoras was arrested in Nagpur on 30 June 1975—as were some second-rung leaders and workers. Two weeks later, the main organizer of the RSS in Maharashtra wrote to the chief minister, Shankarrao Chavan, that their work had come "to a complete halt" and that "the central office-bearers of the Sangh in Delhi have also issued a circular stating it will remain defunct for the duration of the ban." Hence, RSS workers held in detention could be released.[70] On 25 August Deoras wrote to the prime minister, praising her Independence Day speech as "balanced and befitting"; emphasizing that the RSS had "never indulged in any activity which could be dangerous" nor preached "anything against any non-Hindu"; and requesting her to use the "power of the Sangh . . . in a planned way for the development of the nation." "I beseech you," he said in closing, "to rescind the ban imposed on the R.S.S. I would be pleased to meet you if you so desire."[71]

When Indira Gandhi evinced no such desire, Deoras sent another letter in early November 1975 congratulating her on the upholding of her election by the supreme court. The RSS, he wrote, bore "no relationship with Fascism" and had ever stayed "aloof from the power politics." Nor had it anything to do with the popular agitation in Bihar and

Gujarat: "the Sangh has no connection with these movements." He requested her to "kindly assume the correct impression about the Sangh," lift the ban, and release its workers. In January 1976, he wrote to Chief Minister Chavan that he had "not received even an acknowledgement from the Prime Minister. This is both surprising and regrettable." There was apparently "a misunderstanding in the mind of the Prime Minister about the RSS. It is necessary to remove it soon." He requested parole to meet the chief minister and discuss these matters.[72]

Indira Gandhi understood the RSS all too well, and Chavan would not risk her wrath by releasing its supremo. The prime minister was fully aware that the bulk of the RSS leadership had evaded arrest and gone underground—some even prior to the declaration of the Emergency. The chain of craven epistles pleading for release and revocation of the ban continued until the summer of 1976.[73] Unsurprisingly, RSS rank and file in prisons also sent letters of apology to the government.

Nor were Deoras's colleagues outside willing to risk a full-blown confrontation with the government. They decided instead to support the efforts of the Lok Sangharsh Samiti (LSS)—Committee for Peoples' Struggle—which had been formed on the eve of the Emergency. The Samiti counted prominent Jana Sangh faces among its leadership and carried out two nonviolent *satyagraha* campaigns in July and November 1975. The RSS partook of these mainly to pressure the government to revoke the ban. The invocation of the Gandhian idiom did not yield commensurate results. The RSS would claim that it had mobilized 150,000 volunteers across the country of whom 36,000 courted arrest. More reliable data from the government, especially the prisons, put the numbers at less than an eighth of the Sangh's.[74] As the Emergency wore on, senior RSS leaders wondered if they should swaddle their organization in colours of secularism to make it more widely acceptable. Dattopant Thengadi wrote to Deoras's second-in-command, suggesting that the RSS's constitution be changed to suggest openness to all Indians—not just Hindus. At any rate, it was "advisable to categorically restate our non-political character."[75]

Surveying the dismal political landscape from his sickbed, Narayan wrote out a testament in December 1975: "I hope the people of India will be able before long to liberate themselves non-violently from the

present tyranny."[76] If anything, the yoke seemed to tighten early in the new year, as the two non-Congress state governments in Tamil Nadu and Gujarat were sent packing. Both the DMK government led by M. Karunanidhi and the Congress (O) government led by Babubhai Patel had been loci of opposition to the Emergency regime. Karunanidhi, once and future ally of Indira Gandhi, presented himself as a staunch opponent of authoritarianism, and his government turned a blind eye to dissidents fleeing persecution elsewhere. The DMK government was dismissed and president's rule imposed in January 1976. Patel, too, harbored opponents of the regime and permitted oppositional activity in the state, including a large turnout for the *satyagraha* in November 1975. In this case, the Congress party engineered defections and brought down Patel's government.

In mid-January 1976 the senior leaders of the Socialist Party and the BLD in parliament, N.G. Goray and H.M. Patel, wrote to the prime minister. The latter had disingenuously told the house that she was open to dialogue but that the opposition had to create the conditions for it. Goray and Patel noted that the government was better placed to do this—by releasing political prisoners. Nevertheless, a suitable context could be created "if you have as open a mind as you say you have."[77]

Goray passed on a copy of the missive to Narayan, who wrote to Indira Gandhi: "I also feel that steps should be taken to terminate the present impasse and start a dialogue." For this, he needed first to consult senior colleagues from the opposition parties, including Charan Singh, Morarji Desai, Asoka Mehta, and A.B. Vajpayee, among others.[78] Returning from a spell of treatment abroad, Narayan said in an interview that "it is imperative they [opposition parties] come together to produce an alternative to the Congress."[79] The latter, especially those thrown together in Indira Gandhi's prisons, were gradually concluding that they had to unite to survive the onslaught. They had their differences: on whether they ought to merge into a single party or form a joint front, whether they should come together solely for electoral purposes or for wider resistance against authoritarianism. The Jana Sangh had hitherto opposed the idea of merging into a single party. But in early 1976 its leaders in prison began to see the case for a united opposition party. By the same token, some members of other parties

who thus far had regarded the character of the RSS as an insuperable problem were more amenable to papering over it.[80]

In March 1976, Narayan called a meeting of opposition leaders who were out of jail, including the recently released Charan Singh of the BLD. He bluntly told them that under prevailing conditions "the opposition parties seem to be totally ineffective." Unless they came together, "they will all be decimated." The meeting adopted a resolution on forming a united party and set up a steering committee to prepare a plan for integration within two months.[81] This was easier said than done, even though several senior opposition leaders were released from prison in the following weeks and months, including Asoka Mehta of Congress (O), Surendra Mohan of the Socialist Party, Biju Patnaik of Utkal Congress, and A.B. Vajpayee of Jana Sangh (on parole).

Soon after the Bombay meeting, Charan Singh had second thoughts. He felt that the timeline was too ambitious. Even in his state of Uttar Pradesh, the BLD, Jana Sangh, and Congress (O) were struggling to pull together, and the idea of a united party "has come up against rocks."[82] A section of Socialists continued to harbor reservations about merging with the Jana Sangh. Narayan cajoled them into agreement, claiming, "I will also be in a position to put pressure on the Jana Sangh and the RSS because they have also realized that unless they move with the times and radicalize, their future is bleak."[83]

In any event, on 25 May 1976, Narayan announced the formation of a new party amalgamating the Congress (O), Jana Sangh, BLD, and the Socialist Party. This attempt at a shotgun wedding proved abortive. The Congress (O) was unenthusiastic about shedding its identity. The Jana Sangh had not taken a final call on the matter. The BLD claimed it was ready to go ahead, but Charan Singh was clear that the new party would have to foreswear "all kinds of violent, subversive, clandestine and unconstitutional activities." He had in mind not just the RSS, "whose organization is based on a totalitarian concept," but also Narayan's idea of "total revolution."[84] In the four-party meeting in July 1976, he firmly insisted that "no RSS volunteer can join the New Party and no member of the New Party can join RSS." He had recently come across Deoras's letters to Indira Gandhi, and he accused the RSS and Jana Sangh of duplicitous conduct.[85]

A separate attempt at merging the BLD and the Congress (O) also fell through. Charan Singh felt that the latter merely wanted to absorb the BLD into its existing mold. After weeks of discussion, his colleague told the Congress (O) president, Asoka Mehta, that further talks could only be useful if they were interested in "the creation of a New Party, and not in the extension of your own party."[86] The Socialists regarded these bilateral negotiations as an attempt to disregard and cut them to size. They deplored it as "politically unethical" and sought Narayan's intercession. Rebuffed by Congress (O), Charan Singh offered "an unqualified apology" to the Socialists.[87] But this contrition did not come with greater openness to cooperation.

In late September 1976, the Jana Sangh adopted a resolution appealing to the other parties "to unconditionally merge their separate entities in a single political party." The Jana Sangh "unconditionally" supported the unity move and urged that "an earnest effort be made immediately."[88] Charan Singh, for one, was not keen on uniting with the Jana Sangh, which he regarded as a front of the RSS. Further, the party had opposed him in the Uttar Pradesh elections in 1974 and had traduced him after his release from prison some months earlier. In consequence, he was unwilling to work with them—even if they agreed to his leadership of the new party.[89] By this time, Narayan was frustrated enough to write to Mehta that "it will serve no purpose or cause of a united opposition if there is further delay." Two months on, he decided individually to meet leaders of the four parties before a joint meeting was held to decide on amalgamation.[90] Yet uniting these parties seemed a Sisyphean task. In the event, their unity was forged not so much by their collective will as by that of their adversary.

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Indira Gandhi maintained a weather eye on the opposition's moves as well as the people's mood. In June 1976, a year into the Emergency, the Intelligence Bureau submitted a comprehensive note pointing to an increase in popular discontent over the family planning program and detentions under MISA. The economic situation was also tightening owing to inflation, and the rupee was under considerable pressure in international markets. All this necessitated a review of the Emergency.

Since the opposition was yet in disarray, it might be a good move to surprise them by announcing elections in September or October after releasing political prisoners on the first anniversary.[91] The prime minister refused to countenance this suggestion.

The arguments about diminishing returns of the Emergency and disarray in the opposition were reprised in a forty-two-page-long "Top Secret" note handed to the prime minister by P.N. Dhar on 8 October 1976. The note had, in fact, been prepared with the help of Dhar's predecessor, P.N. Haksar. "The general situation in the country is favourable to Prime Minister," the report began, "and is not unfavourable to either the Government or the Congress Party." Yet with the passage of time this situation might be difficult to maintain. The need of the hour was "political initiatives."[92]

During the first two months of the Emergency there had been an undercurrent of opposition in urban areas, but over the following eight months, as prices had stabilized and public order had been restored, popular opinion had turned in favor of it. Since April 1976, these benefits had been eroding, and dissatisfaction was on the rise. This stemmed mainly from the deteriorating economic outlook. There had been a 10 per cent price rise since April: the price of rice, edible oils, sugar, and cloth had gone up in most states. Production in most sectors had gone up since June 1975, but the demand was not keeping pace. In consequence, "fairly large stocks are now lying unsold." This underutilization of industrial capacity was resulting in "stagnation of economy." The upshot of it was signs of agitation among industrial workers, as well as the urban middle and upper-middle classes.

By contrast, the urban and rural poor were enthused by the twenty-point program: "it has succeeded in generating, among the rural poor in particular, waves of hope beyond all rational thinking and expectations." This was despite the program being "implemented in the most routine manner by the Administration, with hardly any political support being mobilised for it, and benefits already provided under it are so microscopic that they are almost unmeaningful yet." This was the "biggest factor in favour of the Prime Minister and the Government." But the note warned of the "very unfavourable situation" created by the coercive family planning program. In particular, the drive in Uttar

Pradesh was "alienating a large number of poor people . . . the Congress runs the danger of losing support of Muslims, Harijans [scheduled castes] and poor people."

The central question was "how to keep this hope [among the poor] alive." The note held that it could only be kept going through "political action." A related problem was that "politically the Congress Party is moribund." It had not even held public meetings to mobilize support for the twenty-point program. The only political program with which Congress workers had any acquaintance was elections: "in the absence of elections, they do not know what to do."

The Congress's principal advantage was that the opposition remained "thoroughly disorganised." Indeed, if elections were held early, "they will be in no position to prepare effectively for them." Drawing on Charan Singh's letters (likely intercepted by intelligence agencies), the report argued that he was unwilling to go ahead with a merger unless the other three parties agreed to shed their identities. This stance was "favourable to the Congress because it divides the opposition parties." In the elections, the Congress needed "as many political parties as possible in the field so that votes may get divided and the Congress may manage the largest single chunk." The present situation was "favourable for gaining the above objective"—though the Congress's majority might be reduced. "On the basis of the hope among the rural poor alone," the note argued, "the Congress has a very good chance of success."

The prime minister perused the note carefully on a trip abroad but did not make any immediate move on the political front. Quite the contrary. On 5 November, she had the Lok Sabha extend its term under emergency provisions by another year—until 18 March 1978. What is more, the Forty-second Amendment increased the standard tenure of the Lok Sabha, including the current house, from five to six years. Yet Indira Gandhi was gradually internalizing the logic of returning to the hustings before the opposition got its act together or the popular mood soured. In the weeks after the parliament's term was extended, her secretariat convened meetings to consider the appropriateness of holding elections.

These deliberations received further impetus from a detailed review of the Emergency presented by the Intelligence Bureau in December

1976. It observed that popular dissatisfaction remained on the rise. If a political solution was further delayed, there could be serious law-and-order problems, including potential threats to the prime minister. On the flip side, the opposition parties were still in jail, and it would take them a while to organize for elections after getting out. The Intelligence Bureau recommended announcing elections within a month of their release.[93]

On the first day of 1977 the die was cast.[94] Ten days later Indira Gandhi set free the dissidents from her own party: Mohan Dharia and Chandra Shekhar. The national capital chittered and quivered with rumors of the Emergency's imminent end. Eventually, on 18 January, the prime minister announced general elections. We may never know for sure what prompted Indira Gandhi to go in for elections. Her intentions seemed opaque even to her closest aides. Then again, the dark and gnarled stretches that led to this decision may have been inscrutable to the prime minister herself.

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The opposition had decidedly mixed feelings about the prospect of polls. Charan Singh wrote to Narayan on 16 January that Indira Gandhi was "thinking of staging an election. I call it 'staging' because conditions of a real election—free and fair election—will be lacking." He astutely observed that she would want "to take advantage of the disarray in which the Opposition finds itself today. We are still not 'one party'." Expressing "great anguish," he warned of the urgency of the matter and the implications of failing "to do a right thing in time."[95]

The announcement two days later was accompanied by the release of opposition leaders, including Morarji Desai. Soon the prohibitions on public meetings and curbs on the press were lifted. Indira Gandhi was apparently amenable to free and fair elections, though radicals in the opposition such as George Fernandes continued to doubt her bona fides. Following intense discussions shepherded by Narayan, the four opposition parties announced on 20 January that they would contest the elections as a single entity: the Janata Party (People's Party).

From the outset, it was evident that balancing the competing claims of Morarji Desai and Charan Singh would not be easy. Desai not only

was the senior-most politician in the opposition but had twice been contender for prime ministership in the old Congress. Charan Singh had emerged over the past decade as a powerful figure in the heartland states of northern and northwest India, owing to his remarkable social coalition of the dominant peasantry and the backward castes. A deal was struck whereby Desai would be president of the new party while Charan Singh would be its sole vice president. Further, Singh would choose all candidates fielded by the party in north India. With polls looming in six weeks, there was no time to think through organizational structure or rules. The principal beneficiary was the Jana Sangh, whose desire to merge was unconditionally fulfilled. Charan Singh and Surendra Mohan deemed it expedient not to raise the question of RSS membership: the organization was still banned, in any case.

In the days ahead, the Janata Party stitched up electoral alliances with the Akali Dal in Punjab and the DMK in Tamil Nadu, as well as a no-contest pact with the CPI (M) in Bengal and Kerala. The opposition got a significant shot in the arm when Jagjivan Ram—minister for agriculture, former Congress president, and prominent Dalit leader—resigned from the Congress and set up a new party, Congress for Democracy (CFD). Ram was among the senior congressmen cut to size by Indira Gandhi after 1972. His record since 25 June 1975 included introducing the emergency bill in Lok Sabha and supporting the Forty-second Amendment. Now, the siren calls of democracy—especially when tied to future prospects—proved irresistible.

Joining him in the new outfit was the powerful former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, H.N. Bahuguna. The latter had been the architect of the Congress's hard-fought victory in the state elections of 1974. Like all Congress chief ministers, he had been loud in proclaiming his approval of the Emergency. But by the end of 1975, Indira Gandhi had forced him to resign and replaced him with another appointee. Sensing an opportunity to get back in the game, Bahuguna plumped for the CFD. He was joined by other prominent leaders, including Nandini Satpathy—former chief minister of Orissa and sometime favorite of the prime minister. Some extinct volcanoes in the Congress (O) rumbled at the missed opportunity. S.K. Patil wrote to Ram that "ideologically your party seems to be nearer to me than the motley crew we have

brought together."[96] In any event, the Janata Party tied up with the CFD. The opposition struck a simple yet resonant note in the campaign: democracy versus dictatorship. As Jayaprakash Narayan put it to an interviewer: "if you vote for the Opposition you will vote for Freedom. If you vote for the Congress you will vote for Dictatorship."[97] Indira Gandhi was surprised by the exit of Ram and Bahuguna. It considerably strengthened the Janata Party's chances in north India. Her advisors remained optimistic about her prospects. Secretary Dhar felt that while her standing had been dented, she would return to power. Indeed, by the end of February 1977 he had started working on the composition of the future cabinet and allocation of ministries. Once she hit the campaign trail, Indira Gandhi's political antennae perked up. After a grueling trip to Bihar, she sensed that the rural north of India was rather more restive than her agencies and advisors had assumed. On returning to Delhi, she asked I.K. Gujral, friend and envoy to Moscow, how he thought the elections would play out. When Gujral politely assured her that she would win comfortably, Indira Gandhi snapped: "Even you have started lying now? I am losing!" As ever, she believed that the Janata Party was tarnishing her image by deploying "money power" garnered from abroad. More surprisingly, she held that her ally the CPI had turned against her—naturally at the instigation of their masters in Moscow.[98]

Yet nothing could have prepared her for the utterly crushing verdict that started coming in on the night of 20 March 1977. With a turnout of 60.49 per cent of registered voters, 194.3 million Indians had queued up at the polling stations. In percentage terms the figure was a shade lower than in the 1967 elections (61.04 per cent), but in absolute numbers it amounted to an increase of 41.6 million voters. Much of this growth in voter numbers came from northern India, which had experienced the brutal edge of the Emergency regime more viscerally than the south.

The Janata Party won 298 seats, while the Congress was reduced to 154. Not only had the Congress lost its majority for the first time, but it was wiped out in northern India, drawing a blank in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, and Punjab, and winning just a single seat in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. Indira Gandhi herself was trounced by 55,000

votes in the pocket borough of Rae Bareli—by her nemesis Raj Narain. Sanjay Gandhi lost the neighboring constituency of Amethi by a larger margin. The only consolation was that the Congress held the southern states. Here the Congress benefited from alliances with smaller parties in Kerala, and in Tamil Nadu with the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK)—the party formed by the charismatic matinee idol turned canny politician M.G. Ramachandran after he had broken with Karunanidhi and the DMK. Although the Congress held its own in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, its vote share in the latter state dropped 15 percentage points.

While the political mood was against the Emergency, the logic of opposition unity also kicked in. The Congress's vote share had dropped from 43.7 per cent in 1971 to 34.5 per cent, but its tally of seats went from 352 to 154. By contrast, the Janata Party polled 41.32 per cent of the votes and took 295 of 544 seats. A decade after the elections of 1967, the non-Congress opposition had eventually found the right combination of political unity and political narrative to sweep Indira Gandhi's Congress out of power. The first transfer of power in national politics was a momentous event—one that did much to restore enthusiasm for the electoral system in the wake of the Emergency. Yet it proved less than enduring as political change.

9

TRAGEDY AND FARCE

The dramatic humbling of India's most powerful politician tremendously boosted the importance of elections in the public mind. The imposition of the Emergency had revealed Indira Gandhi's preference to rely on coercion rather than persuasion or popular appeal. Yet the most important consequence of this bout of authoritarianism was to reinforce the central mechanism of eliciting consent and maintaining the state's hegemony: the ideology of popular sovereignty. Then again, the aftermath of the Emergency witnessed an extraordinary spurt of popular democratic activism. A host of new and renewed social movements entered the democratic arena: civil rights organizations; backward caste and Dalit groups; farmer and labor associations; feminist and environmentalist movements. The Indian press sprang back to life with extraordinary vigor and embarked on an unprecedented expansion, especially in Indian languages, embracing new technology, snazzier styles, and wider circles of readership.[1]

This democratic deepening was all the more remarkable when juxtaposed with the continuing debility of the formal political system. The first non-Congress government in New Delhi was marred from the get-go by the grotesque ambition of elderly men who saw a belated opportunity to shin up the greasy pole. The Janata Party was further beset by the conflicting social bases and corresponding ideologies of its constituent parts. Lastly, and ironically, what most united the party proved as damaging as what divided it: the desire politically to obliviate

Indira Gandhi. "Vengeance is mine" was the motto of many a Janata minister and parliamentarian. Instead of focusing on fixing India, they sought to fix Indira Gandhi.

Thus, while the Janata government managed to reverse some of the most baleful aspects of the Emergency regime, it did not—and could not—undo the systemic change in Indian politics that had enabled the regime in the first place. The latter would have required not just rectifying the extraordinary imbalances of power—between the prime minister and the cabinet, the government and parliament, the executive and judiciary, the central and state governments—but also a collective and renewed commitment to the rules of the game of parliamentary democracy. Yet there was no collective recognition of the damage wrought by treating the rules of the game as so many contrivances to be discarded when inconvenient; no reflective understanding that without such rules the game could not be played for long. In the wake of the Emergency, there was among the Indian political elite neither collective atonement for the wrecking of the rules of the game, nor a collective turning of minds towards a better way of working the system. In consequence, the political system remained prone to careening from crisis to crisis.

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Problems started at the outset with the formation of the new cabinet. There were three contenders for the top job: Jagjivan Ram, Morarji Desai, and Charan Singh. Ram's decision to peel off from Indira Gandhi's fold was seen as a turning point in the run-up to the elections—not least owing to his stature as the leader of the scheduled castes in north India, especially in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. As the result trickled in, he agreed that his party, Congress for Democracy, would function with the Janata Party as a single parliamentary party. In so doing, Ram was staking his claim for the prime ministership. Apart from colleagues in the CFD, he was supported by some prominent Socialists and the not-so-Young Turks, who believed that having a Dalit in the highest office of the land would herald the coming social revolution. While the Congress (O) and most Jana Sangh leaders plumped for Desai, some of the Jana Sangh's top leaders—including A.B. Vajpayee

and Nana Deshmukh—were supportive of Ram's claims. Charan Singh's chances hinged on his own partymen from the BLD, though some key figures who had joined the BLD from other outfits—H.M. Patel and Piloo Mody (Swatantra) and Biju Patnaik (Utkal Congress), as well as the volatile Raj Narain (Socialist Party)—favored Desai's ascension.[2]

Ram's hope that the contention would be settled democratically by the parliamentary party was rapidly deflated. Raj Narain prevailed upon Charan Singh to withdraw in favor of Desai, on the understanding that he would become the home minister. Meanwhile, gerontocracy prevailed over democracy as Jayaprakash Narayan and J.B. Kripalani came out for Desai and asked the party unanimously to accept their decision. Hours later, Morarji Desai took oath as prime minister. He swiftly drew up the list of cabinet members, which included six ministers from Congress (O) and three each from the Jana Sangh and Socialist parties. Apart from Charan Singh, the ministers from the BLD ranks included Patel, Mody, Patnaik, and Raj Narain. Ram, who was given the defense portfolio, took umbrage at Desai's packing of the cabinet. Narayan had to cajole Ram and H.N. Bahuguna from his hospital bed in Bombay. As Desai noted, they eventually "joined unconditionally in deference to your wishes." Narayan himself felt that Ram had "shown magnanimity" and had strengthened the prime minister's position "in tackling the heavy task that lies ahead."[3] As a sop to Ram, his fellow rebel from Congress, Chandra Shekhar, was appointed the president of the Janata Party.

The Congress, for its part, was reeling under the impact of the electoral verdict. Y.B. Chavan took over as the leader of the party in the parliament, while Swaran Singh became the party's interim president. Desai's government treated Chavan with respect and consideration. The leader of the opposition was not only accorded the rank and perks of a cabinet minister, but—in a first—given the opportunity to address the country on All India Radio. All this was, of course, done with an eye to cutting Indira Gandhi to size. But the Congress party had it coming from other directions.

Within weeks of assuming office, the Janata government ran up against the reality that, while it commanded a majority in the Lok

Sabha, the Congress continued to dominate the Rajya Sabha with 154 seats in a house of 244. This effectively handed the Congress a veto on any constitutional amendment to undo the ordinances issued and laws enacted during the Emergency, for constitutional amendments needed a supermajority in the Rajya Sabha: a majority of the membership of the house and two-thirds of those present and voting. The Janata Party had just twenty-seven seats. As Prime Minister Desai observed after early run-ins, "Unless they [Congress] are prepared to face facts and realize their mistake or unless the position is changed in a satisfactory manner, no constitutional amendment can be passed."[4] Desai was a high-minded politician who sought to exude a Gandhian aura of rectitude. But he understood that the only effective answer was to whittle down the Congress party's grip on the upper house.

Members of the Rajya Sabha were indirectly elected by the state legislatures, and a third of the house came up for elections every two years. Changing its composition in a "satisfactory manner" required dispensing with the rules of the game. Some of these, like actively engineering defections, had become such entrenched practices that they hardly seemed a derogation. Indeed, the Janata government had already shown its willingness to perpetuate them. Following the dramatic win in the general elections, the Janata legislators in Gujarat had moved a no-confidence motion against the Congress government under M.S. Solanki, which had been installed during the Emergency after the dismissal of Babubhai Patel's ministry. When the vote failed, further defections were organized from the Congress, leading to Solanki's resignation. Instead of dissolving the legislature, the governor asked Babubhai Patel to form a government. To strengthen his position, the latter secured the entry into the Janata Party of the reviled erstwhile Congress chief minister, Chiman Patel. Soon, the floodgates were opened in Delhi and other states for Congress parliamentarians and legislators to flow into the Janata Party. Law Minister Shanti Bhushan, who had been Raj Narain's lawyer in the crusade against Indira Gandhi's electoral corruption, went so far as to claim that defections to the Janata Party in the Rajya Sabha could not be considered defections at all. Jagjivan Ram folded up his CFD and with his followers joined the Janata. But the anticipated inflow of Congress defectors proved no more than a trickle.[5]

The Desai government now decided to cashier the Congress governments in nine states—Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Orissa, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan—and the union territory of Delhi. The Janata wave had washed these states in the general elections, leaving the Congress beached like a whale. Taking their cue from Jayaprakash Narayan, who had demanded dissolution of these state assemblies, the Janata leadership argued that the Congress governments had forfeited all legitimacy. On 18 April 1977, Home Minister Charan Singh wrote to the chief ministers of these states that a "most unprecedented" situation had been created by the elections, that there was a "climate of uncertainty" in the administration, that the people questioned the propriety of a party so soundly rejected continuing in office, and that cumulatively there were "serious threats of law and order." He "earnestly" suggested that they advise their governors to dissolve the state assemblies and seek a fresh mandate. This alone, he brazenly and sanctimoniously noted, would be "consistent with constitutional precedents and democratic practices."[6]

The Congress leadership cried murder most foul and advised the chief ministers not to cave before the trumpet blasts of the union government. Six state governments approached the supreme court, asking for Charan Singh's letter to be declared *ultra vires* and seeking an injunction against the Janata government using Article 356 to impose president's rule on them. The boot was alas on the other foot. The union government argued that the letter was well within the "wide spectrum" of Article 356. Further, the grounds for invoking the article were non-justiciable. Above all, "The freedom of constitutionally authorised executive action of the highest executive organs of the Union should not be impeded by judicial interference except on grounds of clearest and gravest possible character." The court in this instance was considering "nothing beyond bare possibilities," so no injunction could be granted.[7]

The supreme court ruled in the union government's favor, stating variously that the use of Article 356 could not be excluded if the central government believed preventing a bad law-and-order situation necessitated fresh elections; that "questions of political wisdom or executive policy only could not be subjected to judicial control"; that the home

minister's letter was "nothing but advice or suggestion" and "wrongly described as a 'directive' "; and that the outcome of the general elections was "proof of complete alienation between the [State] Government and the people." The supreme court's proclivity to tack to the political winds had apparently not ended with the Emergency. If anything, it sought to mend its tattered reputation by bending in the other direction. The judgment stored up trouble for the future.

The court dismissed the petitions on 29 April, and the opinions were delivered on 6 May 1977. The government did not wait for the latter. The cabinet decided to dissolve the assemblies and impose president's rule. A draft proclamation was sent to Acting President B.D. Jatti. A devout admirer of Indira Gandhi's, Jatti had been vice president when Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed died suddenly in February 1977. On his unanticipated apotheosis, he had sincerely remarked: "I am thankful to God and Mrs. Gandhi for making me all this."[8] This sense of gratitude now led him to refrain from signing the proclamation and play for time. Never mind that her Forty-second Amendment had engraved into the constitution that the president was bound by the cabinet's advice. Faced with an impasse, Desai threatened the resignation of his ministry should Jatti fail to perform his constitutional duty. The proclamation duly followed.[9]

The government's decision to strike while the iron was hot paid off at the polls. When elections were conducted in June 1977, the Janata Party held its own in northern India, wresting 352 of 425 seats in Uttar Pradesh, 214 of 311 in Bihar, 230 of 320 in Madhya Pradesh, 152 of 200 in Rajasthan, and 75 of 90 in Haryana. The party also won a comfortable majority in Orissa and, with its ally Akali Dal, in Punjab. In West Bengal, the CPI (M) swept to power, inaugurating a three-decade-long spell in power. In Tamil Nadu, M.G. Ramachandran's AIADMK wisely jettisoned the Congress, with whom it had allied in the general elections in March 1977, and cruised to a massive victory over Karunanidhi's DMK. Ramachandran would remain in power until his death a decade later. When the next round of Rajya Sabha elections took place in April 1978, the Janata improved its strength in the house from 27 to 59. By this time, we shall see, its position also improved owing to another split in the Congress. All this enabled the pursuit of

its main constitutional and political task: undoing the Forty-second Amendment to the constitution.

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The Janata government took three stabs at the beast before it impaled the Forty-second Amendment. As early as 7 April 1977, it introduced the Forty-third Amendment bill, comprising seven clauses which sought to overturn the most prominent and pernicious constitutional changes wrought during the Emergency. These included repealing Article 329A, introduced via the Thirty-ninth Amendment to protect the prime minister's election, and Article 31D, introduced via the Forty-second Amendment to confer sweeping powers in dealing with "anti-national" activities and associations; and restoring five-year terms to parliament and state legislatures. No sooner had this bill been tabled than the government realized that it needed both to aim at a more comprehensive amendment and to fortify its standing in the upper house.

The prime minister constituted two committees to consider the entire gamut of issues and consult widely. The cabinet reviewed the resulting proposals in late October 1977 and approved their publication. These forty-seven proposals went beyond the concerns of the previously tabled amendment bill and sought to restore the balance between the judiciary and executive, which had steeply tilted towards the latter by the amendments during the Emergency. In subsequent meetings between Janata ministers and the opposition, the Congress parliamentary leadership seemed open to much of what was on the table. From her perch outside the parliament, Indira Gandhi attacked their alleged complaisance and turned the issue into a weapon in her struggle to reassert her standing in the party. Reading the political tea leaves, the government decided to introduce a less ambitious constitution amendment bill in the winter session of 1977. This would focus on deleting Article 31D, removing the requirement of larger benches and supermajorities for constitutional cases, and restoring the high courts' power to examine the constitutional validity of central laws. The bill sailed through both the houses—with the Congress majority in Rajya Sabha not casting a single vote against it. The constitutional morality of Congress MPs seemed miraculously laundered.

Having enacted the Forty-third Amendment, the government worked towards a follow-on bill. After further consultation, including with the opposition, it tabled the Forty-fourth Amendment in mid-May 1978. The bill had a string of objectives.[10] First, it sought to ensure that fundamental rights could never again be wrenched away by a "transient majority." Hence, any changes to the constitution that impaired or abridged its secular and democratic character, the fundamental rights, free and fair elections under adult suffrage, or the independence of the judiciary could only be made if they were approved by the people via a majority in a referendum in which at least 51 per cent of the electorate voted. The idea of a referendum on any fundamental or ordinary law was unprecedented in Indian constitutional history. Second, in light of the special status given to the fundamental rights, the right to property would cease to be a fundamental right and become a legal right. Taken together, these amounted to making the "basic structure" of the constitution open to change only via referendum and to disabling the oft-cited reason for attacking this doctrine.

The bill also introduced checks and safeguards on the exercise of emergency powers. An armed rebellion was the only internal situation in which an emergency could be declared. Then, too, the proclamation could be made only on the basis of written advice by the cabinet. It would need parliamentary ratification within a month on the same basis as a constitutional amendment and could be extended beyond six months only on a further vote in parliament. The executive could not suspend citizens' right to move the courts for the enforcement of the fundamental right to life and liberty. Alongside preserving the writ of *habeas corpus*, additional safeguards were introduced for preventive detention. The right of the media to report on legislative proceedings freely and without censorship was guaranteed. Finally, the bill sought to redress the imbalance of power between the union and state governments. Article 356 was amended such that president's rule could be imposed only for six months and could not be extended beyond a year. The provision for deploying central forces in a state without the latter's concurrence was deleted. All in all, the bill amounted to a strong attempt at ensuring that the abuse of authority and misuse of powers under Indira Gandhi's Emergency regime could not be repeated.

The bill went through the Lok Sabha but stumbled in the Rajya Sabha. Congress members in the upper house thwarted the provision for a referendum in the process of amending the constitution—so much for their fealty to the ideology of popular sovereignty. They also shot down the attempt to amend Article 31C, which had been introduced in the Forty-second Amendment to ensure that legislation to implement any of the directive principles could not be challenged in the courts as an infringement on fundamental rights. The shadow of the directive principles on the fundamental rights would not be lifted. When the Rajya Sabha passed its own version of the bill, the Janata government reluctantly agreed to have the Lok Sabha adopt it in early December 1978.[11]

In the general elections of 1977, the Janata Party had also promised to repeal the detested preventive detention law, the Maintenance of Internal Security Act, under which tens of thousands had been arrested and detained. The prime minister assured parliament in the opening session that MISA would be reviewed "with a view to repealing it." The charms of raison d'état, however, proved irresistible. As the review progressed, Desai thought that "the problem is not so much doing away with it [MISA] which is simple but working out an acceptable substitute . . . After all, people must realise that not MISA but a certain measure of restraint would have to be thought of in the public interest." He argued that detention without trial was "necessary to protect the many from the violence of a few" and it was "not necessarily anti-democratic" so long as reasonable opportunity was given to the detenus to defend themselves against charges. Admittedly, such charges "may not always be good enough for prosecution or capable of legal proof in a court of law." Yet they may have "sufficient justification for detention" to thwart any danger to peace and order. Indeed, "our constitution fully allows for this."[12]

In late December 1977 the government tabled a bill that ostensibly repealed MISA—only to add a new chapter to the Criminal Procedure Code of 1973 providing for preventive detention without trial. This was unsurprising given Desai's views, but problematic all the same. Hitherto, laws of preventive detention had been regarded as temporary measures. While some such laws had remained operative for long, others had been amended or repealed. Now, the Janata government was

seeking to inscribe preventive detention into the permanent statute. Moreover, anticipating some resistance within the party, the government had, in a clever move, clubbed together the repeal of MISA and reintroduction of preventive detention. Any opposition to this bill could then be branded as opposition to the repeal of MISA.

The government argued that without powers of preventive detention, it would be "greatly handicapped" in dealing with complex and grave problems pertaining to "security, public order and prices." In making the case for preventive detention, it went so far as to claim that the problem with MISA was only the amendments made during the Emergency. The Act itself was apparently fine. Home Minister Charan Singh claimed that adequate safeguards had been proposed to preclude the use of preventive detention for political purposes. The bill kindled the wrath of a section within the Janata Party, as well as the non-Congress opposition in the parliament. Some senior leaders like Madhu Limaye warned Charan Singh that they would openly vote against it.[13]

In the Lok Sabha, the bill was denounced by Somnath Chatterjee of CPI (M) as "a breach of faith with the people of this country." The Janata government's stance was no different from that of successive Congress governments: "it seems to us that the hunger for power is contagious, infectious and insatiable." Not surprising, he may have added, considering the architects and champions of the bill—Morarji Desai, Charan Singh, Jagjivan Ram, Biju Patnaik, and H.N. Bahuguna—were old congressmen with long experience of the benedictions of preventive detention to any government. From the treasury benches, the mercurial lawyer Ram Jethmalani thundered: "I will formally oppose the introduction of the bill because I wish to keep my moral options alive." Were the provisions of the bill, he asked, "less obnoxious than those of the hateful statute that we are seeking to repeal?"[14] In the event, the government withdrew the bill and repealed MISA. Desai decided to bide his time and establish his hold over the party before introducing preventive detention legislation. The Forty-third Amendment act explicitly catered for such future legislation, if only by way of introducing safeguards.

A third domain where the Janata government sought to undo the acts of its predecessor was in the practical independence of the judiciary. In a parting shot at the higher judiciary, Indira Gandhi had superseded

H.R. Khanna and appointed M.H. Beg as the successor to A.N. Ray. Khanna, we may recall, had written the dissenting opinion in the *habeas corpus* case. Soon after Janata came to power, some of its legal luminaries—including K.S. Hedge, who had been superseded in 1973, and Jethmalani—insisted on the ejection of Beg and his replacement by Khanna. This extraordinary demand failed to gain traction. For one thing, Law Minister Shanti Bhushan was a close friend of Beg's and held him in high regard, despite the latter's proximity to Indira Gandhi and Bhushan's to the Congress (O). For another, Khanna himself felt that such a move would be improper and said as much to the prime minister. Desai, too, was set against it.[15]

When Beg was due to retire, the government had to appoint his successor. The next two judges in the order of seniority were Y.V. Chandrachud and P.N. Bhagwati. Owing to their supine stance on the *habeas corpus* case, both were *personae non gratae* for many powerful and vocal figures in the Janata Party, including Raj Narain, George Fernandes, Madhu Limaye, and Jethmalani. There was censorious clamor at the prospect of Chandrachud's elevation to chief justice. None less than Jayaprakash Narayan wrote to Bhushan that the supreme court's decision on the *habeas corpus* case had come as "a rude shock to us all." He felt it would be "most unfortunate" if Chandrachud or Bhagwati were appointed chief justice on grounds of seniority. Narayan's conscience, we may recall, had been stirred by Indira Gandhi's supersession of judges. Now he resorted to special pleading: "the present case is altogether different. The whole nation will know that it was not for partisan reasons but the abdication of duty that the judges are being superseded." While there might be some criticism, he assured Bhushan, "the country will support you." The law minister was more mindful of what this precedent might mean for the supreme court as an institution. He tactfully replied that given "the complexity of the problem and the necessity of utmost care," he hoped to have more detailed discussion with Narayan when they met next.[16]

Rajinder Sachar, a high court judge close to leaders in the Janata, told Raj Narain, Limaye, Fernandes, and Bhushan that it was important to be "clear-eyed" and not set "a dangerous precedent," so opening the door for political interference in judicial appointments.[17] Bhushan

himself came strongly to hold the view that "however distasteful it might be for us to appoint Justice Chandrachud, we had to adhere to the principle." After canvassing the opinion of other high court and supreme court judges, he formally recommended the appointment. Desai unhesitatingly accepted it. The government further strengthened the judiciary's position by reversing the transfer of judges, including Sachar, ordered by Indira Gandhi during the Emergency.

The repeal of MISA, the protection of judicial independence, and the passage of the constitutional amendments—all had their limitations. There was no possibility of a pristine restoration, even if the Janata Party had had the requisite strength in parliament and the right institutional outlook. At best, there was a contingent redressal of the balance of functions and capabilities between various parts of the state. That said, by December 1978 the Janata government had undone some of the most insidious moves made under the Emergency. Curiously, among those who voted for the Forty-fourth Amendment that month was a recent entrant to the sixth Lok Sabha: Indira Gandhi, MP.

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Indira Gandhi's return to the political fray was long in the making. In mid-April 1977, ahead of the CWC to take stock of the general elections, she was reelected to the committee. She chose initially to stay away from the meeting and sent a letter to Congress president D.K. Barooah taking responsibility for the party's debacle. When Barooah along with Y.B. Chavan and Kamalapati Tripathi (leaders of the party in the houses of parliament) showed up at her door, she deigned to attend the meeting. There she said little beyond appealing for unity in the party.

In the subsequent deliberations on the party's electoral performance, there was no direct criticism of her role, though chief ministers and party heads from the northern states spoke of the "excesses" during the Emergency. Further, there were several indirect references to the power exercised by the coterie around her and Sanjay Gandhi. The latter had already resigned from the party after the election results. Now, in a sharp blow aimed at Sanjay Gandhi, his loyalist and former defense minister, Bansi Lal, was expelled from the party for "undemocratic

autocratic and undignified actions." Another acolyte, former information and broadcasting minister V.C. Shukla, was served a sharp reprimand. Barooah, too, tendered his resignation and was replaced temporarily by Swaran Singh. The CWC's statement on the polls was muted: "It is true that some unfortunate events during the Emergency contributed to the defeat of the Congress. It would, however, be wrong to relate our defeat simply to the Emergency."[18]

Unsurprisingly, Indira Gandhi refrained from attending subsequent meetings of the CWC. When the AICC met in May 1977, Swaran Singh opened the proceedings with a call for "collective leadership and real internal democracy in the party." True to form, Indira Gandhi had little use for reflection, let alone contrition. It was "perhaps inevitable" that the opposition would have prevailed someday. But it was not for her to judge "whether we made it easier for them." She did not want "to say anything much about the mistakes of the party—particularly the excesses. These should not have been committed." Yet, "if the party had not gone ahead with its programmes," the country would have been in dire straits. Warning of "more onslaughts" in the offing, she asked party members to raise their spirits and keep up their courage.[19]

Sensing the shifting loyalties of older colleagues such as Swaran Singh, Chavan, and S.S. Ray, Indira Gandhi began quietly rallying a group of younger loyalists such as Pranab Mukherjee and A.R. Antulay to hold aloft her banner. In subsequent intraparty elections, Brahmananda Reddy—home minister during the Emergency and her candidate of choice—was elected Congress president. Congratulating him, Chavan quipped, "You have won the election and we have won democracy." Reddy promptly announced that his success was "a telling demonstration" of Congress workers' "affection for Mrs. Gandhi in spite of the electoral setback." In the reconstituted CWC, Indira Gandhi could count only on six loyalists in a total membership of twenty. Ahead of the state elections in June 1977, she expressed her disinclination to campaign. The party made no effort to persuade her. Nor were her views taken into account in drawing up lists of candidates. The parliamentary party, too, was dominated by those who sought to distance themselves from her. Pranab Mukherjee would later observe that "the process of 'de-Indiraization'" was underway.[20]

Indira Gandhi was well aware of the importance of politics beyond the cloisters of the party. An appalling incident in Bihar underscored her keen political antennae. In the village of Belchi, not far from the state's capital Patna, a resident was shot dead and thirteen others—all Dalits from the scheduled castes—burnt alive by a mob. The opposition in the state and in Delhi tore into the Janata government for failing to check violence against Dalits. Chavan announced in parliament in July 1977 that he would visit the village to conduct an inquiry. By the time he bestirred himself, Indira Gandhi had made for Belchi. Because the village was inaccessible, she travelled on an elephant for the last leg. The trip at once showcased her solicitude for the Dalits—a constituency that had turned against her in north India—and her panache in returning to the political fray.

In the wake of the Belchi massacre, there was a spurt of reporting on violence against Dalits in north India. There was clearly an uptick in such violence after the Janata Party stormed to power. In the decade prior to March 1977, there were 40,000 reported incidents. Between April 1977 and September 1978, there were 17,775 cases—two-thirds of them in the northern states. To be sure, there were significant instances of violence elsewhere—especially in Maharashtra, where the Dalits' demands to rename the Aurangabad university after their icon B.R. Ambedkar met with the unyielding opposition and large-scale violence of the dominant Maratha caste.[21]

In north India much of the violence against Dalits was perpetrated by the intermediate and backward castes—groups that formed a key social constituency of the Janata Party, especially for the BLD and the Socialists in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Many of these incidents turned on the fraught relationship between the politically empowered intermediate and backward castes, such as the Jat and the Yadav, and the Dalit communities whose position had marginally improved during the Emergency. The former owned most of the agricultural land, while the latter had been allotted some land from the village commons. The dominant castes would refuse to supply water from tubewells for irrigating the Dalits' fields. They would also attempt to recover old debts from the Dalits under duress. If the latter demurred, then the panchayat (village council) would impose fines on them. While most Dalits went along with such

restrictions, the more upwardly mobile Dalit communities like the Jatav refused to buckle under pressure. This directed the ire of the dominant castes on the Dalits.[22]

The government realized it had a problem on hand. The prime minister wrote to the chief ministers advising preventive action to curb violence against Dalits. Yet he also insisted that the problem had been "highlighted in the press beyond its legitimate dimensions."[23] The government's defensive stance encouraged Indira Gandhi to go on the offensive and present herself as the champion of the downtrodden. From mid-September 1977 she started traveling across the country, addressing public gatherings and pulling crowds.

Indira Gandhi's renewed prominence spurred her vengeful adversaries, above all Charan Singh, into foolish and ineffectual gambits. The government had already constituted a commission of inquiry into the abuses of the Emergency period led by former chief justice of India J.C. Shah. Another nine commissions were set up to probe her close associates, including one on Sanjay Gandhi's company Maruti Motors. Charan Singh, however, longed for a "Nuremberg trial" for the perpetrators of the Emergency—a call that was echoed by E.M.S. Namboodiripad of the CPI (M), though he may have preferred a Stalinist show trial. Even as the inquiry was underway, the home minister decided to unleash the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). On 3 October 1977, Indira Gandhi was arrested without warrant by the CBI for alleged acts of corruption while in office. The charges leveled against her were a tissue of speculations. When producing her before a magistrate the next morning, the investigative agency could hardly spell out its case. She was released unconditionally.

This sublimely botched arrest catapulted Indira Gandhi to the forefront of public consciousness. The Indian press was critical in its coverage and commentary. Even those well disposed to the government tutted their disapproval. Foreign newspapers uniformly condemned the arbitrary arrest. The Congress leadership, which was seeking to keep her at bay, was impelled to convene an "emergency meeting" of the Working Committee the evening she was arrested. The CWC issued a statement condemning the action as "politically motivated" as well as "highly vindictive, revengeful" and called for an "effective protest

through peaceful, democratic methods." Recovering their nerves, her associates and supporters hit the streets across the country.[24] In Maharashtra and Karnataka, they clashed with Janata Party workers and the police and resorted to vandalism.[25] The party's general secretary reported to the Working Committee that the response was "spontaneous and magnificent." Ten days after her arrest, Indira Gandhi attended a CWC meeting that adopted a resolution castigating the Janata government for its temerity in taking "such an action against one who had led the country for more than eleven years with great distinction and . . . who still occupies a pre-eminent position in the public life of the country."[26]

After initially closing ranks round Indira Gandhi, the Congress leadership developed misgivings when they saw the passions that she still roused in the rank and file. Thousands had courted arrest in the protests. The party president had called for a session of the AICC in mid-October 1977, but it ended in a bid to tamp down the frenzy. "The tone of the meeting," an Indira loyalist recalled, "was totally against the spirit of the formal resolution." Senior congressmen who had previously done her bidding, including Swaran Singh and C. Subramaniam, shot poisoned darts at her supporters. Hardly any of them were allowed to take the stage. Thereafter, her young underlings decided to fan out to the states and take the temperature among party workers. Indira Gandhi, of course, had considerable experience in engineering a split. To showcase her strength, her followers began gathering signatures on a notice of requisition for an AICC meeting—of the party named Congress (Requisition). As earlier, she and her supporters insisted that they wanted party unity—even as they worked to fracture it and cart away a large portion of the spoils. On 18 December 1977, she fired a shot across the bow by resigning from the CWC and the parliamentary board.[27]

Tensions in the central leadership began coursing down to the states—most consequentially, in Karnataka. The Congress government in the state was led by a shrewd and capable chief minister, Devraj Urs. He had been, by some distance, the best chief minister in Indira Gandhi's party. Urs had ridden to power in the elections of 1972 and had proceeded to consolidate his hold on the party and the state administration. In the former, he broke the preponderant power of the two

dominant agrarian castes—the Lingayat and the Vokkaliga—that had hitherto dominated the politics of Karnataka. Urs shrank their political clout by forging a broader social coalition including the backward castes, the Dalits, and Muslims. This rainbow coalition was reflected both at the upper reaches of the state party unit and further down. To weaken the social grip of the two dominant castes, Urs also focused on redistribution of land to backward castes and Dalits, as well as a substantial policy of affirmative action in public employment and educational institutions. Such "reservations" for Dalits were mandated by the constitution. The state also had a history of some affirmative action for the backward castes going back to the early twentieth century, though it had been watered down owing to the power of the dominant castes. Urs rejuvenated and expanded reservations for backward castes. Most important, he drove the bureaucracy to deliver on land reforms and reservations. Urs had made deft use of the Emergency both to implement these policies and to sideline his rivals, especially the state Congress president K.H. Patil, whom he supplanted with a political lightweight.[28]

In the 1977 general elections, the Congress had under his leadership held its own in Karnataka. Nevertheless, the situation changed significantly with Indira Gandhi's defeat. The new Congress president, Brahmananda Reddy, reinstated Patil at the helm of the state unit—principally to check the chief minister. Urs was not only close to Indira Gandhi but was also the target of a commission of inquiry set up by the Janata government. In her war of position with the party leadership, Urs firmly sided with her and advocated a split. Before the year was out, Urs and Patil were at loggerheads. Attempts by the central leadership to forge a compromise fell through. Patil connived with the leader of the Janata Party in Karnataka, H.D. Deve Gowda, and engineered the defection of Congress legislators. Both sides lined up before the governor, insisting they had the numbers. Urs specifically asked that his majority be tested on the floor of the house. Desai's government chose yet again to disregard established conventions and dismissed Urs' ministry on 31 December 1977.[29]

Over the next two days, Indira Gandhi and her supporters organized a "National Convention of Congressmen" in New Delhi. Apart from the younger party members who had hectically canvassed her cause,

Indira Gandhi pulled to her side several senior leaders, including former chief ministers: Kamalapati Tripathi, P.V. Narasimha Rao, Devraj Urs, Jagannath Mishra, N.D. Tewari, and Zail Singh. In her opening remarks, she spoke of the listless drift under the Janata government and of her own yearning for unity in the Congress. Under the Janata government, the gains made by Dalits and tribal communities were being reversed. "Class struggle and caste struggle" were growing in tandem, as evidenced in Belchi. The Congress had to launch a peaceful movement to protect the weakest sections of Indian society. She skewered the Congress president for enabling the Karnataka government's ouster and suspending Urs from the party. Invoking the Congress split of 1969, she said, "I had decided to go ahead without knowing how many would side [with] me."[30]

On cue, the convention anointed her president of the Congress party. Speaking again, Indira Gandhi sought to drape herself in the ideological colors of 1969: "Our slogan should be forward with socialism." The Congress's social policies were being dismantled; public sector enterprises weakened and multinational corporations encouraged; and the "whole concept of self-reliance is in danger." She insisted that it gave her "no pleasure in splitting the Congress," but it was now "necessary to have a clear cut ideology and programme." The Congress split of 1978 was a curious event where, contrary to Marx's dictum, the same historic personage appeared for the second time in old costumes. Fortunately, none took her ideological bluster seriously. The new party named itself Indian National Congress (I—Indira), openly advertising its Caesarist mold.

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"Thank God," quipped Congress parliamentary leader Y.B. Chavan, "they have not declared her the Prime Minister of the country." He went on: "Who are they to elect her Congress President? They are nobody in Congress."[31] Chavan believed that Indira Gandhi was a back number. He told a young MP from his state of Maharashtra, "there is no example in history that after such an electoral debacle with disgrace, any leader has been able to stage a comeback in politics."[32] Not for the last time, Indira Gandhi's opponents underestimated her.

Elections in four states the following month cast into stark relief their misprision. Although her party lacked the requisite organization, Indira Gandhi gave the campaign everything she had. In Andhra Pradesh, Congress (I) took 175 of 294 seats; the old Congress came third, behind Janata, at 30. The outgoing chief minister, J. Vengala Rao, had in fact been a keen supporter of Indira Gandhi's. He had gone so far as to attribute the party's strong performance in Andhra in the 1977 general elections to the sedulous implementation of the twenty-point program. At the fateful moment of the split, he dithered and paid the price. Vengala Rao would later see the light and hearken unto her. The new chief minister, M. Channa Reddy, was another Indira loyalist, whom she had installed as governor of Uttar Pradesh. In Karnataka, the combination of Devraj Urs and Indira Gandhi proved formidable. Congress (I) coasted with 149 seats of 224; the Janata Party was relegated to a distant second at 59. Urs returned as chief minister.

The Janata Party benefited in the northeastern state of Assam from the Congress split and emerged as the single largest party. It took 53 of 126 constituencies. The state Congress leadership had largely stayed with the old party, which secured twenty-six and left Congress (I) with just eight seats. The Janata Party formed a minority government led by Golap Borbora with the support of the communist parties which had twenty seats. In Maharashtra, too, Janata performed better against a divided Congress. It emerged as the single largest party, with 99 of 288 seats. The old Congress had strong leadership—Y.B. Chavan, Vasantrao Naik, Vasantdada Patil, and Sharad Pawar—that ensured the party finished with sixty-nine seats—ahead of Congress (I), which won sixty-two.

Adversity does make strange bedfellows. Faced with a hung assembly in Maharashtra, Indira Gandhi sounded out Swaran Singh about stapling a coalition of the two Congress parties. Soon, a coalition government was sworn in, with Vasantdada Patil as chief minister. It lasted just over three months. The deputy chief minister from Congress (I), Nashikrao Tirpude, flagrantly undermined Patil. In a strange turn of events, a group of Patil's supporters led by Sharad Pawar deserted—despite Patil and Chavan's entreaties—to form a new party called Samantar Congress (Parallel Congress). Prior to doing so, however, Pawar had taken care to sound out his old Congress mate: Chandra

Shekhar. The Janata president readily agreed that his party would join a coalition government led by Pawar. The new government took office in July 1978.[33]

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All along, the Janata Party was wracked by internal dissensions. Forged in the white heat of the Emergency, it proved brittle in the cooler clime of power. The fundamental problem was the Janata's inability to make the whole greater than the sum of the parts. Despite coming to power, it remained an agglomeration of its constituent parties—with all their political rivalries, social contradictions, and internal conflicts. Indeed, the Janata Party was cleaved along axes of ideology, caste, class, and rural–urban divide.[34]

The most cohesive group in the Janata Party was the Jana Sangh. The Jana Sanghis understood that the Janata government afforded them the best opportunity to enhance their political acceptability and acquire a pan-Indian persona. If A.B. Vajpayee sought and obtained the foreign minister's berth, it was not merely because of his interest in foreign policy, but rather because it enabled him to speak for India. Similarly, L.K. Advani plumped for the ministry of information and broadcasting precisely because it put him in control of key organs of civil society. The Jana Sangh leaders were also aware that their Hindu nationalist ideology placed them at odds with the secular and left-leaning groups within the party. Their approach was to play down this dimension, especially the thorny question of RSS membership, and to support Morarji Desai and his group from Congress (O).

The Jana Sangh and Congress (O) shared a predominantly upper-caste and urban social base. This set them apart from Charan Singh's BLD and the Socialists, whose social base was the upwardly mobile intermediate and backward castes of rural north India: Jat, Yadav, Kurmi, and Saini, among others. This divide would emerge as a major fracture in the Janata Party. From the start, there were significant tensions along this fault line. In May 1977, ahead of the elections in Uttar Pradesh, Charan Singh would deplore the list of candidates prepared by the central party leadership, which significantly reduced tickets for BLD members. "This is all very distressing," he wrote to

Desai, "according to an understanding arrived at in your presence, I was to have the final say in the matter."[35] Later in the year, when the party president sought further to dilute the BLD's clout in Uttar Pradesh by reducing its nominees for the State Executive Committee, Charan Singh let fly: "it is clear that the Janata Party is nothing more than a United Front, if not worse." He accused the leadership of seeking to "hand over the reins of the Janata Party to those who do not enjoy the confidence of the people."[36]

Then, too, the BLD's social base—the agrarian backward castes—were at odds with the Dalits, who were mostly landless workers or, in some cases, marginal cultivators. Within the Janata Party there was no cohesive group that stood for their interests, but they formed the base of important leaders like Jagjivan Ram and Ram Dhan (former "Young Turk"). As the relationship between the intermediate and backward castes and the Dalits worsened in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the latter's leaders made common cause with the upper-caste leadership of the party. The killings in Belchi aggravated this divide. At a press conference in June 1977, Ram Dhan said that after the Janata Party's victory, "the so-called backward classes were also perpetrating crimes" against Dalits. As a result, the latter were increasingly alienated from the Janata Party. Charan Singh took this up with Desai, but the prime minister refused to move against Ram Dhan. Indeed, "Failure to take action against . . . Ram Dhan" would feature high on the catalogue of grievances that Singh would draw up against Desai.[37]

Overlaying these social and political cleavages were the ambitions and rivalries of senior figures in the Janata Party. Desai deployed his powers of patronage—ministerial berths in the central and state governments, gubernatorial appointments—to bind together the Congress (O) lot. This also enabled him to elicit the support of other groups, such as the Congress for Democracy, notwithstanding Jagjivan Ram's own ambitions, and the former Congress dissidents around Chandra Shekhar, who was appointed Janata Party president without having to run for the post. Charan Singh proved an altogether trickier colleague.

Within months in office, the home minister was sufficiently piqued by thinly veiled criticism from colleagues in the CFD—Bahuguna and Ram—to send a remonstrative letter to the prime minister. "I leave it to

you to judge," he wrote, "if any Government . . . can ever be run if its important members exaggerate problems, organize agitations against their own colleagues and make public statements, condemning the very organization to which they belong." Desai could not possibly "allow the situation to deteriorate further." The prime minister mollified Charan Singh and asked Ram and Bahuguna to exercise restraint.[38]

The ill-conceived arrest of Indira Gandhi became another flashpoint. Chandra Shekhar went into a huddle with senior party colleagues including Madhu Limaye, Nana Deshmukh, and Ramkrishna Hegde. He wrote to the prime minister that the arrest and unconditional release of Indira Gandhi had "filled us with dismay": "this highly sensitive political question has not been properly handled." The Shah Commission hearings were having "a terrific impact" on the people and she had been "thrown on the defensive." The crisis within the Congress was "also getting aggravated." All these gains had been frittered at one fell swoop. "The whole thing," he emphasized, "had the unintended result of reuniting the Congress under her leadership." The Janata leadership must "deeply ponder" and "try to retrieve the situation." If it was possible to secure "a favourable decision," they should approach the high court. At any rate, "political raids, searches and arrests should be suspended for some time." He recommended forming a small committee to chalk out a political strategy and avoid "unplanned actions."[39]

Chandra Shekhar may have overestimated the degree to which Indira Gandhi had recovered her grip on the Congress. But his own letter had the consequence of widening the cracks within the Janata Party. Morarji Desai was already fuming at Charan Singh's incompetence. The prime minister knew that Singh's excessive zeal in pursuit of Indira Gandhi stemmed partly from a desire to upstage him. On learning of the letter, Charan Singh strode glowering into his office and penned a note of resignation. Soon, Fernandes and Chandra Shekhar prevailed upon him to retract it. Not that he needed much persuasion. Desai publicly denied that the home minister had resigned.[40] It was the first of Charan Singh's Achillean sulks that would eventually sink the Janata Party.

As Janata leaders continued to sound discordant notes, Desai loftily maintained that "such freedom of expression has to exist." Gone were

the days when Lord Melbourne's maxim had prevailed: "It does not matter what we say so long as we say the same thing at the same time." Indeed, "ventilation of differing views in public within certain limits" was good for democracy. Just in case he was mistaken for a born-again liberal, Desai added, "I emphasize the words 'within certain limits', those are the limits of decorum, discretion and propriety"[41]—high standards for a party that counted among its stalwarts such veteran muckrakers as Raj Narain. Worse, the prime minister himself was vulnerable, owing to his son, Kanti Desai, whom he had appointed as his private secretary. Given the malign precedent of Sanjay Gandhi, Desai had been warned against this—to no avail. Ever unwilling to be persuaded, Desai tossed aside such advice with adamantine impatience. When allegations of corruption against Kanti went public, Desai offered to have them investigated and, if proven, step down as prime minister. Of course, he did no such thing. The problem soon returned to haunt him.

On 11 March 1978, Charan Singh wrote to Desai about allegations against Kanti. "People in general" were "disturbed to know that you do not propose to hold any enquiry at all." He insisted that even if the allegations were false, "an enquiry would be appropriate. The reason is simple: every minister, much more so the prime minister along with such members of his family as are living jointly with him, should not only be incorruptible but should appear to be so." He told the prime minister to follow the "sage advice" of the Earl of Chatham, British premier of yore: "if allegations are made against a minister, they should invariably be enquired into. If the allegations are found wrong, the finding will raise the prestige of the government; if they are found correct, the minister concerned will have to leave the Cabinet, in which case also the prestige of the government will go up."[42]

Desai replied two days later that he had expected such a missive from Charan Singh. The question was whether an inquiry should be instituted even if the allegations were unsupported by prima facie evidence. "Our country has somehow become a vast whispering gallery," he observed, "in which character assassination seems to be a pastime." More galling to Desai was the condescension in which the letter was marinated: "The matter is not one in which I need be given any authority from the days of George III. I have myself followed the

principle you have quoted more than anyone else." Then again, "we must take cognizance of the situations and conditions prevailing today in our country." Special pleading was followed by recriminative jujitsu: "I have had a number of letters making allegations about you and your sons-in-law and, painful to state, even your wife." If he were to follow Charan Singh's advice, "we would be appointing a number of Commissions of Inquiry every day." In fact, he was not minded to order an inquiry into his son, who was not a government official: "There can . . . be no official inquiry in such matters of private nature." He was surprised that Charan Singh had suggested it. And it was "significant . . . that you have not chosen to discuss it with me but have preferred to write to me about it."[43] Desai clearly thought Charan Singh was preparing to administer him the bare bodkin. He was not incorrect.

Charan Singh replied days later, suggesting that if there were allegations against his relatives, "they must be enquired into—the sooner the better. I would like you to kindly appoint a Commission at the earliest." Further, he argued that "the formulation regarding your son's status requires another look if it is to effectively silence his critics." Given the nature of his duties, including helping Desai with political matters, Kanti could hardly be described as a private individual. In closing, Charan Singh upped the ante. Kanti was a member of a Hindu joint family with Desai as its head. "Which means the financial interests of you both are the same. Legally this position leads to conclusions which are obvious."[44]

Desai was taken aback. He quickly replied that Charan Singh had misconstrued his letter and "misunderstood my reference to your sons-in-law and your wife." There was no question of equating this with Kanti's case. Having retracted a bit, he mounted the high horse: "I am not one to look for alibis of this nature." Nor was he one to concede an inch: "no grounds for an inquiry exist." Charan Singh persisted one last time. The government was "working under a shadow that bodes ill." Desai should "hasten" to "allay the public apprehensions" by ordering an inquiry. The prime minister replied that this was "a gross exaggeration." He ended the exchange tersely: "I regret I cannot agree."[45]

In the course of this epistolary duel, Desai seriously contemplated moving Charan Singh out of the home ministry, so precipitating his

exit from the government. The absent-minded ramble into a cabinet reshuffle did not get too far. Singh was crucial to the Janata's standing in the key north Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Haryana. Desai thought the better of his idea. But he remained determined to bring Charan Singh to heel. He resolved to do so by undermining the BLD-led ministries in these states.[46]

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The Janata government in Haryana was led by Devi Lal, who alongside Rao Birendra Singh had formed the first non-Congress government in the state in 1967. A Jat from Haryana, he had joined Charan Singh's party in 1974. Lal sported the air of an earthy peasant who cared little about the niceties of administration or bourgeois norms. His whimsical style and arbitrary decision-making soon put off others in the state legislative party. Devi Lal himself felt aggrieved at being forced by Desai to include in his cabinet a Congress (O) man, Balwant Rai Tayal, as deputy chief minister. Later, when he dropped from his cabinet a close associate of George Fernandes', Sushma Swaraj, he was compelled by the central leadership to induct her again.

The pile of humiliation grew heavier when dissenters within the party—encouraged by Desai and Chandra Shekhar—almost ensured the defeat of a Janata candidate in a by-election to the Haryana assembly. To bring matters to a head, Lal offered to seek a vote of confidence within the party. The central party leadership readily agreed but prescribed a secret ballot—an unusual procedure aimed at fortifying the dissidents. Towards the end of April 1978, Lal informed Chandra Shekhar that "owing to the blatantly partisan attitude" and the "farce, a fraud being perpetrated on us," he was willing to quit the party with his supporters.[47] In the event, the dissidents were asked to stand down, and Devi Lal continued in office.

The BLD chief minister in Uttar Pradesh, Ram Naresh Yadav, was similarly balancing on the brink. Yadav was the first chief minister of the state from the backward castes. A political novice, he had been picked by Raj Narain to contest a parliamentary seat in the general elections of 1977. After the Janata's victory in the state elections of June 1977, Raj Narain championed his case for becoming chief minister—

although he was not a member of legislature—on the assumption that he would be pliable. Charan Singh, too, was keen on a Yadav for the top job in order to cement his social base of Jat, Yadav, and other backward castes. Very like Devi Lal, Yadav was barely competent in running the show, but he was also routinely slandered by upper-caste leaders in his own party. When by-elections were held in the parliamentary seat vacated by him, the Janata candidate's defeat at the hands of Congress (I) was partly owing to internal dissension.[48] Again, a clamor rose from the dissidents—led by the Dalit leader Ram Dhan—for Yadav to prove his grip on the legislative party. Although he won the vote of confidence in early June 1978, the episode embittered his supporters and especially peeved his patrons, Raj Narain and Charan Singh.[49]

Bihar was the third BLD-dominated state riven by factional sniping. Here, the focal point of dissension was Chief Minister Karpoori Thakur's plan to implement affirmative action in government employment and education for "other backward classes." It was an index of the upper castes' hold on north Indian politics that Thakur's move—explicitly promised in the Janata manifesto—triggered a sharp backlash from the upper-caste leadership in Bihar, including the Congress (O) and Jana Sangh groups. The latter's student outfit the ABVP was particularly active in the "anti-Reservation" agitation. The Janata's central leadership, citing the protests, tarried signing off on the plan. Thakur was willing to tweak his proposals and take into account the suggestion by Vajpayee and others to include economic as well as caste criteria. In late April 1978, he proposed 26 per cent reservation for the backward castes: 60 per cent of which would be for the "excessively backward people." In addition, there would be 5 per cent reservation for women and 10 per cent for "poor and economically backward people."[50] At length, the central leadership intervened to end the agitation.

Charan Singh followed these developments with mounting consternation. In early April 1978, he wrote a long letter to Desai with a litany of complaints against H.N. Bahuguna. The latter, he insisted, was the principal force seeking to destabilize Yadav's government via his many lieutenants as well as his "close friend" and cat's paw, Ram Dhan. Worse, Bahuguna had had "two scurrilous pamphlets published . . . painting me in the darkest possible colours." Charan Singh proceeded to list

Bahuguna's political, personal, and moral turpitude, reminding the prime minister that another MP had sent him a thick account of his sordid conduct. The right course was "to ask the Minister concerned to resign and then to hold an inquiry. But you have done neither."[51]

Instead of reflecting on fractures within the party and its own role in deepening them, the top leadership saw it purely as a problem of indiscipline. At the Janata national executive's meeting in April 1978, there was a widespread feeling that the party lacked the requisite emotional unity and coherence, which was impeding disciplined and coordinated action. Chandra Shekhar observed that the internecine disputes were inflicting "grave damage" and that it was imperative to end them. Morarji Desai warned that if the party splintered it would deal a big blow to the country. He agreed that the problem of indiscipline had become "very serious" but felt that self-discipline was more effective than disciplining from the top. It was decided that party members should be told to stop airing differences and grievances, and that any infraction of party rules should be punished irrespective of the offender's position in the party or the government.[52]

The first target for disciplinary action chosen by the party leadership was Devi Lal. The proposal was subsequently dropped, but it spurred Charan Singh to resign from two key party fora: the national executive and the parliamentary board. Listing the attacks on the BLD chief ministers of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar, he wrote to Chandra Shekhar, "All three cases fall in a pattern . . . Those who have a low social origin have no right to shape or lend a hand in shaping the destiny of the country."[53] In so writing, Charan Singh also had himself in mind. His observation may have been self-serving, but it was not far wrong. By early June, his ally Raj Narain was demanding the dissolution of the party's national executive. Desai believed that Narain had placed an aluminized explosive under his throne, hoping to install Charan Singh when the deed was done. Having assured himself of the Jana Sanghis' support, he decided to strike preemptively.

An excuse was soon at hand. Following contretemps over a meeting addressed by Raj Narain in Shimla, Desai moved summarily to eject him. Four days later, Charan Singh gave an interview lamenting the government's failure to put Indira Gandhi behind bars. The people

think, he said, "we in Government are a pack of impotent people who cannot govern the country." If she were detained under MISA today, "there would be hundreds of mothers of Emergency victims who would celebrate." In any other country, "she would by now be facing a trial on the lines of the historic Nuremberg trial." The prime minister worked himself into a lather at a cabinet meeting on 29 June. He secured the cabinet's unanimous approval to bring down the guillotine on Raj Narain and Charan Singh.[54]

Desai wrote a lengthy missive to Singh, expressing his surprise and distress at the statement. Singh had broken the principle of collective responsibility of the cabinet. Any action to book Indira Gandhi fell entirely in the purview of his ministry. If he was convinced a Nuremberg-style trial was "necessary, desirable and feasible," he should have tabled a proposal in the cabinet. "You have tried to create an impression," Desai continued, "that swift action against Mrs. Gandhi and her colleagues was not taken because we were dragging our feet and were against action." This was "completely at variance with truth." Given his denigration of the cabinet, he could no longer continue as minister. Charan Singh resigned, assuring Desai that he would speak in "the proper forum—the party and the Parliament."[55]

The Janata Party knew its fortunes turned on having Charan Singh inside the tent. The national executive unanimously asked him to stay on as a member and on the parliamentary board. Charan Singh gratefully agreed.[56] In parliament, his followers put it about that the prime minister had sacked him because he had sought an inquiry into the doings of Kanti Desai. The stench of impropriety wafted up the Raisina Hill to the new president of India. N. Sanjiva Reddy was another instance of the quest for high office thwarted by Indira Gandhi but consummated with the Janata Party. Reddy, we may recall, had been duplicitously dumped by Indira Gandhi during the presidential election of 1969. He was not Morarji Desai's first choice in 1977 but was eventually elected unopposed. Reddy now sought to assert himself vis-à-vis his old colleague from the Congress. Expressing concern about recent discussions in parliament, he asked for the correspondence with Charan Singh from March. Desai sent it along, insisting disingenuously that "the circumstances which necessitated the demand for his

resignation are independent of our earlier correspondence."[57] The prime minister had one more corner to watch.

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In late September 1978, the Congress (I) announced that Indira Gandhi would contest the by-election to parliament from the Chikmagalur constituency in Karnataka. Under Chief Minister Devraj Urs, the party was formidable in the state. Besides, running from the south would underscore Indira Gandhi's pan-Indian appeal. The party had waited until the election schedule was published before declaring her candidature, concerned that the government might stall the by-election to impede her return to the Lok Sabha.[58] The announcement set aflutter the dovecotes of the Janata Party. Unnerved at the prospect of having her in parliament, the Janata leadership went overboard to ensure her defeat.

The party dispatched her famous rival, George Fernandes, to manage the campaign for its candidate: former Congress (O) chief minister of Karnataka, Veerendra Patil. The Janata's general secretary—also from Karnataka—R.K. Hegde instructed party units across the country to "rush all possible help and assistance" to the campaign. The party deployed a significant sum of Rs. 40 million and roped in influential sections of the national and local press to beat the drum against Indira Gandhi. Chandra Shekhar and L.K. Advani hit the campaign trail, claiming in speeches that Indira Gandhi was past her sell-by date and that Chikmagalur would "bring about her political death." Morarji Desai wisely refrained from campaigning but asked the voters to give "a befitting reply to Indira Gandhi's attempt to whitewash her past."[59] The Janata Party's appeal to "Friends of Chikmagalur" was farcical: "The tears of children, wives, sisters and mothers who lost their fathers or husbands, brothers or sons during the emergency have not dried yet. The wails of the poor who lost their hearths and homes have not stopped."[60]

The Janata's overwrought campaign was lampooned in the sprightly slogan of Congress (I): "*Ek Sherni Sau Langoor—Chalo Chalo Chikmagalur*" ("A lioness against a hundred monkeys—Onwards to Chikmagalur"). Urs kept out all non-Karnataka party workers and ran

a tight campaign. Indira Gandhi trounced Patil by over 77,000 votes. The humiliating defeat triggered another bout of recrimination in the Janata leadership. But they were not done with her.

On 20 November 1978 Indira Gandhi took oath as member of parliament. The next day the privileges committee submitted a report stating that she was guilty of breach of privilege and contempt of the house. The committee had been looking into a charge levelled at her by Madhu Limaye of the Janata Party. Limaye claimed that back in December 1974 he had asked a question in parliament about import of machinery for Maruti Motors, run by Sanjay Gandhi. To hush up the out-of-turn favor extended to the prime minister's son, she and her minions had allegedly harassed and intimidated the officials that were collecting information in response to the parliamentary question.[61] The committee's inquiry was one of many attempts by Janata members to ensnare Indira Gandhi.

The report was perfectly timed but did not specify punishment, which was left to the Lok Sabha's decision. Morarji Desai felt that an apology to the house should suffice. But many of his colleagues were frothing at the mouths. Ram Jethmalani wrote to all Janata MPs claiming that the Indian people "have rightly found fault with us for feebleness and procrastination in enforcing the law against her." In other countries, if a person was found guilty of subverting the constitution or democracy, "he is shot dead as traitor." However, since "we wish to govern by rule of law" the maximum lawful punishment "must be inflicted without fear or favour." Failure to do so would "spell the doom of the party." Jethmalani urged his colleagues to "give up all soft sentimentalism and rise to the occasion." If not, they should "wind up all investigations, withdraw all cases and burn up the Shah Commission Report."[62] Clearly, the point in issue was not parliamentary privilege but exacting retribution against Indira Gandhi.

Far from tendering an apology, Indira Gandhi struck a defiant note in the Lok Sabha on 13 December. The Janata Party, she said, was animated by "their personal vendetta against me." Shifting gears to the *J'accuse* mode, she charged the ruling party with assorted crimes: "failure to check divisive forces," "callously neglecting" the weaker sections of society, and "lowering India's prestige" in the world. "The atmosphere

in this House," she said in closing, "has been reminiscent of the scene in Alice in Wonderland, when all the cards rise up in the air and shout, 'Off with her head'! My head is yours."[63] Prime Minister Desai moved a motion for the maximum punishment: expulsion of Indira Gandhi from the Lok Sabha and imprisonment until the house was prorogued. It was carried 279 to 138. In sending Indira Gandhi to prison, if only for a week, the Janata Party quenched its militants' thirst for vengeance. But this unprecedented punishment capped Indira Gandhi with a halo of martyrdom and imparted a dose of demonic energy to her party's rank and file.

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In the aftermath of the Chikmagalur election, the Janata Party realized that it faced a resurgent Congress under Indira Gandhi's leadership. With by-elections looming in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the party needed Charan Singh to pull his weight in these heartland states. Charan Singh, for his part, sought to leverage the opportunity to return to the government. In early November 1978, he wrote to Desai, "in your capacity as Leader of the Janata Parliamentary Party," complaining that Jagjivan Ram had been attacking him in public. So far, he had "kept scrupulously silent": "But now my patience has reached the limit. I have decided to hit back." Admittedly, this "will harm the Janata Party" but he had no other course open to him.[64] In a show of strength, Charan Singh organized a massive farmers' rally in Uttar Pradesh, where he declared that those who had tabled the Emergency resolution in parliament were now the masters of the Janata Party. Desai asked a trusted official to speak to both men. He found Charan Singh "full of bitterness," while Ram said that Singh "has been told by astrologers that the P.M. would not last beyond November and that he must enter Government now so that when the time comes he could be the head of the interim Government and stake his claim for Prime Ministership thereafter."[65]

Weeks later, Charan Singh made it clear that he could no longer campaign for the party with conviction. This sent the Janata leadership into a tizzy. Chandra Shekhar hectically lobbied for Singh and his followers to return to government. In so doing, the party president also wanted to assert his prerogatives with the prime minister. After

consulting several senior colleagues, he suggested that both Charan Singh and Jagjivan Ram be appointed deputy prime ministers. Desai reluctantly agreed, as did Ram. But Charan Singh resented being equated with Ram and scuttled the idea. What is more, he publicly floated the possibility of the Janata Party converting itself into a federal or united front. The idea was alarming enough for an ailing Jayaprakash Narayan to "most fervently appeal" to Singh to drop the idea and to Desai to "find a way" of bringing Singh back "with honour into his cabinet."[66]

In mid-January 1979, Narayan wrote separate letters to Desai, Charan Singh, and Ram pleading with them to end the bickering and "save the Janata Party from breaking up."[67] After more feverish parleys, Charan Singh agreed to return to government as a deputy prime minister with Ram as the other. Despite his misgivings, Desai consented to Charan Singh taking the finance ministry. The prime minister, however, drew a line at bringing Raj Narain back into the cabinet.

President Sanjiva Reddy looked askance at these gyrations in the Janata Party. When the dust settled, he wrote a long, extraordinary epistle to his prime minister. "I have been pondering very carefully," he wrote, "over the growing disenchantment, and disillusionment of our people." They were "deeply depressed with our inability to live up to their expectations and redeem our promises to them." Taking a not-so-veiled dig at Desai, he claimed that it was "not possible to rekindle the old confidence with mere self-righteousness or a holier-than-thou attitude." Having trained his guns, Reddy fired his salvoes. The first was about "the dangerous drift that has set in, and the resultant loss of direction in the governance of the country." Second, the doings of the prime minister's principal secretary, V. Shankar, "a retired officer, who has been associated with various business interests," had led to "a lot of unfortunate and avoidable speculation." Third, he had "repeatedly drawn your attention to the adverse inferences that were being drawn about your son." Desai's explanations had "not unfortunately ended the controversy surrounding him." Indeed, it has "transformed into a major political issue." In closing, Reddy insisted that he had no political ambitions but was only writing "to set the record straight by voicing my concern over the prevailing state of affairs."[68]

Ahead of Republic Day, Reddy sent his speech to Desai "for information." The prime minister promptly wrote back that by convention the speech was sent to him before being finalized. He was willing to let that pass. His gorge rose, however, because the speech referred solely to the achievements of farmers—Charan Singh's constituency—and to no other activity of the government. Worse, it did not carry "a message of hope and cheer."[69] A few days on, Desai replied to Reddy's earlier letter at equal length. Dismissing the observations about his principal secretary and his son, he reprimanded the president for venturing ill-informed generalizations. In fact, the situation in the country was "much better than what it was when we assumed office and even better than at any time in recent years." As for internal differences in the Janata Party, they had been "highlighted beyond their proper proportion . . . [and] given a personal touch of the most undesirable kind." Nevertheless, Desai averred, "we have at last succeeded in finding a solution."[70] Reddy remained unconvinced by this hopeful conclusion.

Meanwhile, another charge was igniting to dynamite the Janata edifice. This stemmed from the ideological orientation of the Jana Sangh group within the party, especially their umbilical ties to the RSS. In the headlong rush to weld the party ahead of the elections of 1977, this issue had been shoved under the carpet. Whenever it resurfaced later, Desai sought to massage the problem with an eye to retaining the support extended to him by the group from the Jana Sangh. For instance, when Limaye broached this issue in late 1978, he replied that "such matters should not be the subject of correspondence but had better be discussed."[71]

Leaders of the Jana Sangh played their cards carefully. In the central government they backed Desai, but in key north Indian states they sought to maintain equable relations with Charan Singh's BLD group. The coming together of the BLD and Jana Sangh had enabled the party to sweep these states, and the Jana Sangh was keen to continue this arrangement. Thus, in the crises that roiled the governments in Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar, Jana Sangh leaders—especially Vajpayee—counselled the need for unity.

No sooner was Charan Singh back in the cabinet than a crisis broke in Uttar Pradesh. Chief Minister Ram Naresh Yadav sacked four ministers

on grounds of alleged corruption—two each from BLD and the Jana Sangh. The latter went into high dudgeon, and its legislators began meeting the rebels who had previously sought to oust Yadav. When the central party leadership tried to intervene in the crisis, Charan Singh warned them to desist. Yadav, he insisted, had a secure majority. Be that as it may, the Janata parliamentary board—urged by top Jana Sangh leaders—asked Yadav to obtain a confidence vote from his legislative party via a secret ballot. This emboldened rebels, and Yadav narrowly lost the vote. In the subsequent election to choose a new leader, Charan Singh managed to ensure the victory of his nominee, Banarasi Das, against that of the Jana Sangh.

Concurrently, Singh launched a scathing attack on the RSS, calling it a fascist organization. Of the strength of his ideological views there was no doubt; now they were boosted by political imperatives. His cabinet colleague Biju Patnaik grew vocal in his calls for the Jana Sangh members to dissociate themselves from the RSS. Patnaik even attempted to persuade RSS supremo Balasaheb Deoras to allow the Jana Sangh and its student wing the ABVP to go their own way. Deoras, who periodically made tactical noises about throwing open the RSS to non-Hindus, blandly responded that the RSS had no control over these organizations. The party president's attempt to call a truce foundered on the rocks of the Jana Sangh's insistence that the question of dual membership had already been settled and of their secular opponents' claim that it was moot. This impasse drew the Jana Sangh closer to the Congress (O)—a development that led to the unravelling of Karpoori Thakur's government in Bihar. In mid-April 1979, large-scale communal rioting broke out in the town of Jamshedpur. The riots were sparked off by a procession led by a legislator from the Jana Sangh. An investigation by a party panel also identified the RSS as implicated in the violence. In response, the Jana Sangh legislators pulled the plug from Thakur's government.[72]

The next move of the Jana Sangh–Congress (O) combine was to lever out Haryana chief minister Devi Lal—a step that had the approval of Jagjivan Ram. Simultaneously, if unrelatedly, the Janata Party also announced disciplinary action against Raj Narain, removing him from the national executive. With three of his principal protégés undone, Charan Singh decided to go for the jugular. In the first week of July, Raj

Narain announced the formation of a new party: Janata Party (Secular). A raft of Janata members in Haryana and Bihar, including prominent young leaders like Laloo Prasad Yadav and Ram Vilas Paswan, joined this outfit. As a member of parliament who crossed over to the new entity put it, "RSS men have succeeded in securing an octopus-grip over the Janata party."[73] In effect, the intermediate and backward castes in northern India were withdrawing their allegiance to the Janata Party—just as they had done to the Congress ahead of the 1967 elections. Soon, the opposition parties tabled a no-confidence motion in parliament.

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The Congress (I) was also undergoing internal churn, though the outcome was to strengthen Indira Gandhi's position. Her efforts to reunite the two Congresses under her leadership were initially reciprocated by Swaran Singh but eventually scuttled by Chavan. In the meantime, Devraj Urs started asserting himself in the party, demanding that he hold the presidency of the state Congress unit as well as the chief ministership. In a display of lèse-majesté, he also started criticizing the backstage role of Sanjay Gandhi. Indira Gandhi responded by sounding out congressmen in Karnataka and appointing a new president. When matters came to a head in late June 1979, Urs struck out to form his own outfit, carrying with him most of the state's legislators, as well as several members of parliament. Soon, the bulk of the other Congress joined the Urs group, so swelling its ranks.

On 11 July, the no-confidence motion against the Janata government began to be debated. Within a couple of days, it was clear that the government would not survive the vote. At a meeting on 14 July, Chandra Shekhar, Fernandes, and Vajpayee suggested that Desai should step down. Their unvoiced concern was that if the government lost the vote, the president of India could not invite the Janata Party to form another ministry. Rather, he would have to turn to the next-largest group in parliament, which now belonged to Raj Narain and would be helmed by Charan Singh. By the same token, Desai intransigently refused to resign without a vote. He knew that several aspirants for his job were lurking in the wings.

That afternoon, Jagjivan Ram wrote him a lengthy letter affirming that he would vote against the motion in the parliament. But this did not mean that "I was or am satisfied with the performance and style of functioning of our government, nor does it mean that I am satisfied with all our policies or the lack of them." His litany of complaints was no different from that of Indira Gandhi's on her last day in the parliament. Having thrown his hat into the ring, the deputy prime minister averred that he was "personally absolutely certain" that they would lose the motion of no confidence.[74] Fernandes and other Socialists voted with their feet and walked out of the government. In the following days, the Janata Party dissolved like a clump of earth cast into a torrent.

Morarji Desai sent in his resignation and that of his cabinet to President Reddy on 15 July but did not advise dissolution of the Lok Sabha. He wrote in a separate letter that his party was "still by far the largest party in the Lok Sabha," so it was entitled to explore the possibility of forming an alternative ministry with the cooperation of other parties. He advised Reddy to give the go-ahead. As leader of the party, Desai would report to him the results of his endeavor.[75] Charan Singh having left to take over Janata (S), Chandra Shekhar and Nana Deshmukh among others felt that Desai must also step down as party leader—the former wanted to contest for the post. Jayaprakash Narayan went further and advised Desai to "take the next logical step by resigning from the leadership of the Janata Parliamentary Party and thus facilitating the election of Jagjivan Ram as the new leader." The latter could muster support to "salvage the Janata party and save democracy." Desai would not budge: "I owe a duty to the country and the Party, and in performing it, I have necessarily to rely on my own judgment."[76]

Sanjiva Reddy, too, tended to rely on his own judgment—never mind the conventions and precedents of parliamentary government. The president apparently refrained from inviting Desai because he had resigned while a no-confidence motion was pending. Reddy also declined to invite Charan Singh because he had resigned from the Janata Party only after Desai had resigned. In fact, the president had already lost his confidence in the ability of the Janata Party to pull together and provide a stable government. Instead, he invited Y.B. Chavan of the Congress to explore the possibility of forming a government—on the

grounds that it was his "moral duty as Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha who moved the motion of no confidence."[77] Chavan was in no position to do so. He promptly offered the support of seventy-five MPs to Charan Singh, who wrote to the president staking his claim. Reddy now asked Charan Singh and Desai to send him a list of MPs who were willing to support them within two days.[78] Before Desai could get his act together, Reddy invited Charan Singh to form a government. Desai resigned as leader of the Janata Party, paving the way for Ram. It was curtains on a long career.

Charan Singh's claim crucially turned on the support offered by Congress (I): "unconditional support," as he noted in a letter of thanks to Indira Gandhi. In pursuit of the highest prize, Charan Singh was not only willing to sup with her but had Raj Narain seal the deal via Sanjay Gandhi. On Indira Gandhi's part, it was a lucidly cynical move. As a close associate wrote, "We were clear in our mind about every faction of the Janata Party. We knew that the Janata Party was bound to get crushed under its own weight. We wanted to ensure that it broke from within. Consequently, we decided to support the Charan Singh faction against Morarji Desai."[79] By propping up Charan Singh, Indira Gandhi ensured that there could be no reconciliation between the different factions of the Janata Party.

Prior to swearing him in, President Reddy asked Charan Singh to obtain a vote of confidence from Lok Sabha within a month. On 28 July 1979, Charan Singh took over as prime minister with Chavan as his deputy. Speaking before television cameras, he said with admirable candor that his life's ambition had been fulfilled. Unfortunately, in politics as in courtship, the pursuit of gratification without commitment can only lead to short-lived affairs. Indira Gandhi had no desire to keep Charan Singh's show afloat. Rather, she wanted a midterm election soon after the Janata splinters had thoroughly discredited themselves. By postponing the convening of Lok Sabha, the new prime minister hung on by his nails for a few weeks. Blinded though he was by ambition, Charan Singh eventually read the writing on the wall. On 20 August 1979, he decided against facing a parliamentary vote, resigned, and advised the president to dissolve the Lok Sabha.

Reddy did not afford Jagjivan Ram an opportunity to chance his arm. He dissolved the house and asked Charan Singh to stay on as caretaker prime minister. Reddy's decision stemmed from his assessment that the Janata Party was no longer capable of providing a stable government. This political judgment was long in the making and it influenced his choices at crucial moments in the unraveling of the Desai and Charan Singh governments. In depriving Jagjivan Ram of a chance to cobble together a government, the president was acting contrary to established conventions. In its own way, this was a fitting conclusion to the Janata government, which had made an enormous contribution in rolling back the Emergency but had failed to accomplish a collective turning of minds towards playing the game of parliamentary democracy differently.

10

THE WIDENING GYRE

In the seventh general elections, held in early January 1980, almost 203 million Indians lined up at the polling booths. This was some 8 million more than those who had voted in March 1977. Yet the turnout of 57 per cent of the electorate was 4 percentage points lower than in the last general elections—a sign perhaps that Indian voters did not regard this as a particularly competitive contest. Poised against a Janata Party that was discredited and in disarray, Indira Gandhi's Congress seemed the only national-level alternative. The Congress (I), for its part, ran a wholly personalistic campaign centered on Indira Gandhi. Its election manifesto unabashedly declared that "Indira Gandhi is the only leader who can save the country after its recent traumatic experience."[1] The main campaign slogan—coined by Vasant Sathe, an assiduous proponent of electoral Caesarism—was equally explicit: "*Na jaat par*, *Na paat par; Indiraji ki baat par; Mohar lagegi haath par*" ("Not on caste, nor religion, but with faith in Indira, vote for Congress").[2]

The Congress bettered its 1971 performance by a smidgeon, wresting 353 of 529 Lok Sabha seats with a vote share of 42.7 per cent. The two Janatas trailed a long way at 41 and 31 seats. The CPI (M) pipped one of them to the third place, securing 37 seats. But the CPI (M) was now reduced to a regional force, confined mostly to West Bengal and Kerala. The Congress (I) regained its hold over north India, while retaining the south. Tamil Nadu was trickiest of the southern states, for the Congress's own clout had never waxed in the state after 1967. Indira

Gandhi, we may recall, had allied with Karunanidhi's DMK in 1971, only to fall out with him during the Emergency. In 1977, she had tied up with M.G. Ramachandran's AIADMK as the junior partner, and the alliance had taken 34 of 39 seats. After the election, however, Ramachandran had jilted Indira Gandhi and supported the Janata. Ahead of the 1980 elections, she held out an olive branch to Karunanidhi, soldering an alliance as the senior partner. This astute move paid off handsomely, as the combine won 37 of 39 Lok Sabha constituencies in Tamil Nadu.

Indira Gandhi saw this general election as marking the start of a dynastic succession. Sanjay Gandhi had stepped away from the party after the debacle of March 1977. Yet he had played an important role in his mother's return from obloquy and oblivion. During the Janata years, he had been implicated in several commissions of inquiry, including one on his car company, Maruti. Sanjay Gandhi had also been imprisoned for a short spell—a moment that his mother had publicly proclaimed as the making of his political career. He had posted a solid win in his Lok Sabha constituency in Uttar Pradesh. His loyalists had figured prominently in the party's candidate list, bringing to the new parliament loutish sensibilities and low habits but also cementing his base and branding his impress on the party and the government. As I.K. Gujral observed in his diary, Sanjay Gandhi now occupied "a pivotal position that was second only to the prime minister herself. Such a bestowal of authority was unprecedented in India's Parliamentary history. The ministries and departments had been 'retailored' to facilitate his 'extra-constitutional' authority."[3]

Sanjay Gandhi's apotheosis ended in tragedy: a plane that he was piloting crashed in New Delhi on 23 June 1980. For Indira Gandhi, this was a bereavement past bearing. All her colleagues and confidants, she believed, had played her false. Her younger son was the one who had stood by her through hell and high water. As she wrote in anguish to an old friend, "To me he gave the sort of support that comes not from a son but from an elder brother." And he was the heir apparent: "So much and so many depended on him." Indeed, in the recent elections "he attracted larger crowds than I did."[4] Unsurprisingly, after Sanjay's passing, Indira Gandhi looked to her elder son, Rajiv, to enter

politics. A sycophantic chorus in the Congress party carried him aloft to the Lok Sabha in mid-1981.[5]

Of greater concern, prior to Sanjay's demise, was the party's debility in the Rajya Sabha. Mirroring the Janata's plight in 1977, the Congress had only 69 members in the upper house of 244. This reflected its enfeebled standing in the state legislatures, which formed part of the electoral college. In none of the states, barring Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, did the Congress command a majority: not for want of effort in orchestrating defections from other parties. No sooner had the passage of a bill been impeded in the upper house than the prime minister decided to dismiss all the nine non-Congress state governments, to dissolve their legislatures, and to hold elections afresh.[6] This action, proclaimed in February 1980, drew on the precedent set by the Janata government in throwing out all Congress governments in states. New Delhi claimed that cashiered governments had lost all legitimacy after Janata had crumbled ignominiously to defeat in the general elections. The opposition parties howled in hypocritical protest, but their eloquent arguments were the poetry of the politically impotent. The supreme court, having upheld that precedent on specious grounds, had little choice but to place its imprimatur on Indira Gandhi's egregious powerplay. With these judgments, the court doubly undermined the rules of the game of parliamentary democracy.

When elections were held in these nine states, the Congress (I) stormed to power in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat, Orissa and Punjab. Tamil Nadu continued to elude its grasp. In a reversal of the Lok Sabha verdict, M.G. Ramachandran's AIADMK trounced the Congress–DMK alliance. Thereafter, political sense prevailed on both sides. Indira Gandhi and Ramachandran established a good working relationship.

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The most pressing concern for the prime minister was the state of the economy. The Janata government under Morarji Desai had stewarded the economy carefully and conservatively. To be sure, Desai had released some bees that had been humming in his bonnet for years. The apostle of temperance pushed through a policy of prohibition, never mind its

impact on revenue; the advocate of fiscal rectitude sought to balance the books by auctioning government holdings of gold. The drive to "rationalize" the licensing regime continued with the appointment of yet another committee to examine its working in recent years.

The Janata government, however, found the going tough on two fronts. After a recovery in the early period, industrial production nosedived in 1979–80. This stemmed from an interlinked set of supply-side constraints. The railways' capacity to move freight dropped steadily in the Janata years. This impacted the largest commodity carted by the railways: coal. The ensuing shortfall in the availability of coal pulled down thermal power generation and the production of steel. The railways' shortcomings also forced a considerable diversion of bulk traffic to road transport. This, in turn, necessitated greater imports of fuel and dented the balance of payments.[7]

Second, a drought in several parts of the country in 1979 led to a decline in agricultural production. This was accentuated by the shortage of power in an agrarian economy increasingly reliant on electric pumps for irrigation. Food inflation started moving north. In an unnerving replay of the crisis of 1973–74, there was another massive external shock. Oil prices now surged in the wake of the Iranian revolution, which led to the ousting of the ruling Pahlavi dynasty and which disrupted production for several months. Soon, the Islamic Republic found itself at war with Iraq, leading to further escalation of prices. It took until mid-1981 for oil prices to stabilize at $32 per barrel. Thus, inflation galloped in the last year of the Janata government.

The cumulative impact of crawling industrial production and power generation as well as the second oil shock was devastating. The Indian economy contracted by no fewer than five percentage points in 1979–80: the sharpest decline in the twentieth century. This played no small part in lending a modicum of credibility to Indira Gandhi's claim that she alone could restore order. In office, she soon realized that the current account of balance of payments had been pushed deep into the red. The government would have yet again to approach the IMF for assistance to tide over the foreign exchange crisis. But her government also realized that the longer-term solution lay in revamping the public investment program and drastically enhancing its efficiency. Thus, as

part of the sixth five-year plan (1981–86), New Delhi decided to undertake a major macroeconomic adjustment program supported by a $5.8 billion loan from the IMF under its Extended Fund Facility.

The government also preemptively indicated to the IMF that it was prepared to take tough measures to mobilize domestic resources and scale back on expenditure. In the budget of 1981, Indira Gandhi approved a sharp increase in indirect taxes and later permitted a steep rise in the administered prices of domestic crude oil, kerosene, electricity, and fertilizer.[8] These measures were flayed by the opposition as inimical to the poor and as kowtowing to international pressure. Indira Gandhi, however, passed them off as steps voluntarily taken by the government to stave off a massive recession.[9] The Indian approach would later be known as the idea of "home-grown conditionality"—as opposed to conditions imposed by international financial institutions.

Contrary to the critics' claims, this turn to the IMF was not dictated by external players. Rather, it was conceived of and pushed by officials and experts in the government who favored macroeconomic stabilization and a move towards further liberalization of the economy. If anything, the fund found itself hamstrung in acceding to India's request for a massive drawing, owing to opposition from the United States. The Reagan administration believed that India should not tap the fund but rather borrow from financial markets. This was continuous with its broad prescription for the developing world. In the event, Indira Gandhi met President Ronald Reagan in Cancun in October 1981. They seemed to get along well. At her request, the Reagan administration softened its stance and refrained from voting down the Indian request to the IMF board.[10]

In her last term, Indira Gandhi pushed the tiller further in the pro-business direction charted during the crisis of the mid-1970s and continued during the Emergency: primarily by relaxing the industrial licensing system. In the mid-1970s, this tilt had been more pronounced towards newer players, whom the government sought to encourage in a bid to balance the economic power of the incumbent big business houses. By the early 1980s, this approach had led to the emergence of several important new business groups.[11] The steepening of the pro-business tilt was symbolized by an unprecedented dinner in Indira

Gandhi's honor hosted in an elite Delhi hotel in 1980. Her host was Dhirubhai Ambani, India's largest producer of polyester. Reliance ranked in the top fifty industrial houses in 1980 but would be among the five largest by 1984.[12]

During these years, Indira Gandhi's economic policy was focused on raising the profitability of industrial and commercial establishments by easing restrictions on capacity expansion, removing price controls, and reducing corporate taxes. The public sector enterprises, too, were urged to shed their flab and get competitive. Another important development during this period was the liberalization of electronics imports, particularly of computers. This provided the basis for the subsequent expansion of the telecommunications and the software industries.[13] However, there was no decisive move towards dismantling the existing system of government controls over the economy: that would take longer and a more acute crisis. Yet by the time Indira Gandhi exited the stage, the Indian economy had been elevated to a higher growth trajectory—one that would continue to the end of the century.[14]

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Surveying the landscape months after her return to the helm, Indira Gandhi wrote that her government faced "a terribly difficult situation economically and politically." She was particularly peeved at the latter. "The opposition parties which spoke up so loudly for democracy," she continued, "did not accept the people's verdict in our 1971–72 elections and they have not accepted it in 1980." There was "utter indiscipline and many agitations all over the place." She wondered if a developing country could "develop in these circumstances." Could the "poor or the underprivileged have a chance of making their voice heard or of exerting their rights?"[15]

The economic challenges, as we have seen, were not solely of her making, and her policies were aimed at mastering them on the point of pain. On politics, however, Indira Gandhi was purblind. Her censure of the opposition had all the force and falsity of a half-truth. For here, she was confronted with the reflexive effects of and responses to her attitudes and practices both past and present. In particular, her attempts since 1969 to tip the balance of institutional power decisively towards

the executive—by splitting and neutering the parliamentary party; by taming the power of Congress chief ministers; by supplanting judges and subverting and suborning the judiciary; and by the battering ram of the Forty-second Amendment—all had stored up an abiding distrust of her will-to-power among her political opponents. Then she had taken the axe to the non-Congress state governments without even a veneer of justification. So, the opposition continued to nip at her heels in and out of the parliament. Mutual antipathy, expressed in a steady stream of invective, acquired in her mind the contours of a strategic rivalry.

Yet she did nothing to assuage legitimate concerns. On the contrary, when prominent voices in the Congress party, especially Sathe and A.R. Antulay, yet again mooted the idea of a presidential system, Indira Gandhi did not shush them. Rather, she claimed to welcome a debate on such a fundamental question without disclosing her hand. In the spirit of her Caesarist style, she added, "what we want is to make the system more responsive . . . to bring in the system responsive to the people."[16] In May 1982, as President Sanjiva Reddy's term was ending, she contemplated stepping down as prime minister and taking over as president of India. Her principal secretary would recall that she was "indeed very serious." She was tired of winning elections for the Congress and wished to "mete out shock treatment to her party, thereby giving it a new stimulus."[17] With Rajiv Gandhi warming her chair, she may have added, the presidential and prime ministerial offices could be fused into a single complex of dynastic Caesarism. That would have been an original contribution to political theory and practice. Yet even Indira Gandhi couldn't have everything. She stayed her hand and arranged the elevation to presidency of Zail Singh, the union home minister and former chief minister of Punjab who had steadfastly stood by her when she had been bereft of power.

Soon, this continuing bid to drain power to the apex of the political system boomeranged on her. In January 1983, the Congress lost the state elections in its southern bastions of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. These states had stayed with the Congress even at the nadir of her fortunes in 1977. This setback was in large measure owing to the prime minister's high-handed treatment of the state Congress units and the

series of luckless chief ministers she had foisted on them. The backlash, especially in Andhra, took the shape of an insurgent campaign by the movie star N.T. Rama Rao and his new Telugu Desam party. Known best for his mythological movies, Rao—unlike M.G. Ramachandran—was a political novice: although Telugu cinema had played an important role in crafting the linguistic and cultural identity of the region. His popular aura, as well as the backing of the dominant landed caste of Kammas and the money of the new regional entrepreneurs, helped propel his campaign—couched in the idiom of regional pride—to a stunning victory.[18]

Thereafter, the non-Congress chief ministers started coalescing in a loose federal front, demanding more equitable relations between the union and the states. The prime minister took a dim view of all this. The corridors of politics were abuzz with rumors of plans to unseat Rama Rao. She told her principal secretary, P.C. Alexander, to inform the chief minister that these were baseless. "Assure him," she wrote, "that we have never, and do not wish to topple him or any other opposition government." Given her record since 1959, she felt it prudent to clarify that "Even in Kerala . . . the responsibility was not mine but [Home Minister] G.B. Pant's, who was strongly against communism."[19] The natural brevity of political memories aside, this mendacious assurance may have had a morsel of credibility had the prime minister not been engaged, at that very moment, in toppling the elected government in Jammu and Kashmir.

There was a comic coda to this tale. In August 1984, the governor of Andhra Pradesh dismissed Rama Rao as chief minister and appointed in his stead a man named Bhaskar Rao. A former colleague of Rama Rao's, Bhaskar Rao claimed to have the numbers with the support of the Congress party in Andhra Pradesh. The chief minister was convalescing after a heart surgery but immediately requested the governor, Ram Lal, to convene the assembly so that he could prove he still carried a majority. Ram Lal, a former chief minister of Himachal Pradesh who had lately been eased out for corruption, sought to anticipate New Delhi's wishes. A farce was enacted on the lawns of the gubernatorial residence, where Bhaskar Rao paraded ninety-one individuals whose support he claimed. It transpired that many of them

were not legislators at all. The governor promptly proceeded to anoint him chief minister.

All this came as a surprise—not unpleasant, certainly—even to the inveterate intriguers who staffed the prime minister's house. Her principal secretary, Alexander, was apprised of these happenings by the Intelligence Bureau, whereupon he checked with Indira Gandhi whether she had known what was afoot. The prime minister "appeared to have been taken completely by surprise." Unfortunately, the prospect of a delightful denouement was marred by massive public protests that erupted in the state, forcing the police to shoot at crowds. Worse, a clutch of opposition leaders—A.B. Vajpayee, H.N. Bahuguna, and Farooq Abdullah—landed in Hyderabad to demonstrate their solidarity with Rama Rao. From neighboring Tamil Nadu, M.G. Ramachandran urged Indira Gandhi quickly to distance herself from this odious affair.[20]

The prime minister claimed that the governor's actions were entirely "within his constitutional jurisdiction." The state Congress unit was "naturally annoyed with N.T. Rama Rao because of his anti-Centre attitude and actions. That is why they offered to support him [Bhaskar Rao]." If anything, Rama Rao had penned his flock of legislators with the BJP's help and had "kept them closely guarded as if they were prisoners." In the event, she was forced in parliament to disavow her role. The governor was told to test Bhaskar Rao's majority on the floor of the legislature. The latter sensibly slunk away, resulting in Rama Rao's return to office.[21]

When an old friend mildly questioned the propriety of it all, Indira Gandhi truculently replied:

> As for democratic norms, it is well to remember that such party divisions and changes of Government have taken place in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and other States much earlier, by some one leaving the Congress Government and the party, and forming a new Government . . . You should also know how I was expelled from Parliament soon after being elected by a big majority.

Rama Rao himself had dismissed elected local bodies in the state. But those who were "now crying hoarse did not find these orders

undemocratic . . . And as usual, I get the blame for everything." Finishing on this note of injured innocence, she wrote, "the Opposition, the press and self-styled liberals, seem to have a new yardstick to measure democracy and that is, 'Anything said or done against Indira Gandhi and the Congress is right.' " This epistle was as good an epitaph as any for the rules of the game of parliamentary democracy in the long 1970s.

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Beyond Andhra Pradesh, Indira Gandhi confronted a political landscape littered with crises. Three of these proved intractable and were decidedly worse for her handling: Assam, Jammu and Kashmir, and Punjab. Each of these braided in distinctive ways strands of contestation over identities, the quest for political autonomy, and desire for economic development. And then, there was geography: all were frontier states abutting neighbors with whom India had fraught relations and were in the frontline of the wars of 1962, 1965, and 1971. Besides, each housed militant groups that looked abroad for assistance in an armed struggle against the Indian state. This licensed New Delhi to frame these crises as problems of national security, fomented by malign foreign powers—a trope that fit snugly with the prime minister's worldview. And she would cynically employ it to justify her erratic, disingenuous, and eventually disastrous policies.

At the time of independence in 1947, the sprawling province of Assam bordered Tibet, Bhutan, and East Pakistan. Over the following decades, the hill and tribal districts of Assam were carved into several states and union territories. Yet Assam remained the center of gravity of northeastern India. The official language of the state was Assamese, though Bengali was also widely in currency. Assamese linguistic and cultural identity had gradually emerged since the late nineteenth century in contradistinction to the dominant culture of the Bengalis, who had also staffed much of the colonial bureaucracy. Concurrently, there was a significant movement of landless Bengali labor into the plains and forests of Assam—owing to the closing agrarian frontier of eastern Bengal, which was no longer capable of productively absorbing the rising population.[22] This secular trend of migration continued through the great depression of the 1930s, the Bengal famine of 1942–44, and

the partition of India and Assam. The bulk of the landless Bengali peasants drawn to Assam were Muslims, but after 1947 there was a major influx of Hindus from East Pakistan.

Migration from East Pakistan was a recurrent motif in the politics of Assam. During the census of 1951, the Indian government had instructed all states to compile a National Register of Citizens, which would not include refugees from Pakistan in the wake of partition. This was conceived as an administrative record but inevitably impinged on the questions of citizenship and the right to vote.[23] This admittedly imperfect attempt at bureaucratic enumeration fell by the wayside in most states, but in Assam it was resuscitated in the following decade.

The trigger was the census of 1961, ahead of which Assamese politicians and public figures expressed concern at the allegedly massive illegal migration from East Pakistan. In parliament, this issue was picked up by the Jana Sangh and cast as a problem of Muslim "infiltration": a vocabulary regularly used by its parent, the RSS, and soon embraced by the union home ministry. The Nehru government confirmed in April 1962 that there was "a large increase of Muslim population" in Assam's border districts and that this "may also be partly due to migration from East Pakistan." The state bureaucracy angled out the dodgy citizenship register, proposing to update it and deport the illegal residents who had entered the state without a visa after 1951. The ensuing expulsions stoked religious tensions in local communities. These were aggravated by the contemporaneous inflow of nearly 130,000 Hindus fleeing communal riots in East Pakistan. In the 1960s, according to later estimates, there were nearly 970,000 illegal migrants, the bulk of whom were Hindus.[24]

The gargantuan torrent of refugees into eastern India during the Bangladesh crisis of 1971 led to renewed calls for identifying and deporting "foreigners." By this time, the Congress party in Assam was floundering. A deep crevasse had opened in the party between a majority advocating strong action against illegal migrants and the Muslim legislators who opposed it as a bigoted drive. The party held its own in the elections of 1967 and 1972, but at the cost of alienating the Muslims. Yet by 1973, it was confronted with the rapid emergence of a new social force: students. As elsewhere in the country, especially Gujarat and

Bihar, the Assamese students were galvanized by the soaring inflation and worsening economic prospects.

Assam was, in fact, in relative economic decline since the late 1960s—because of drying public investment and the inability of the central government to foster private investment in all regions of India.[25] Thus, the All Assam Students' Union (AASU)—an independent and ramified network of students and the youth—pressed both for the expulsion of illegal migrants and for an economic new deal for the state. Assam, they argued, was in effect an internal colony of India: a location that sent out primary commodities, especially tea and oil, the production of which was dominated by non-Assamese commercial and business groups, and the refinement of which happened elsewhere, with mere crumbs being held out to the people of Assam. The AASU's charter and its energetic style of agitation captivated the popular imagination. But it also deepened communal rivalry as Muslim students set up their own union. This polarization was sharpened during the Emergency, for poor Muslims were also a beneficiary of the meagre land reforms. The Congress party was routed in the general elections of March 1977. Soon Assam had its first non-Congress, Janata government under Golap Borbora, which lasted less than eighteen months. The AASU resumed its campaign with renewed vigor after the Emergency, triggering a chain reaction of protests and strikes that rocked the state. It was now joined by another umbrella entity of lawyers, literati, and government employees called the Asom Gana Sangram Parishad (AGSP).

Ahead of the elections in 1980, both these outfits called for a statewide boycott, insisting that polls be held only after deleting the names of all illegal residents from the electoral rolls. The election commission stated that such a revision could only be undertaken after the elections. Meanwhile, the Congress government in Assam promised to prepare the citizenship register and constitute new tribunals to deport illegal residents. On the campaign trail, though, Indira Gandhi expressed her disapproval of disenfranchising Muslims. This consorted well with her attempt to project herself as the patron of all minorities: be they Muslims in Hindu-majority Assam or Hindus in Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir and Sikh-majority Punjab. In the teeth of massive popular opposition, the election to the Lok Sabha could only be held in

two of fourteen constituencies in Assam—both dominated by Bengalis. Although the Congress carried these seats, parts of the state were riven by intense violence and rioting between Assamese Hindus and Bengali Muslims.

Days after returning to power, Indira Gandhi invited leaders from the AASU and AGSP for talks. The student leaders presented a memorandum than ran over a hundred pages, touching on politics, identity, and economy, as well as demography and citizenship. On the last, they demanded an updated register of citizens and the detection and expulsion of all foreigners who had come to Assam without documents since 1951. The prime minister tried to persuade them that those who had been enrolled as voters before 25 March 1971 should be allowed to stay, while the rest should be sent back. This was the date agreed by Bangladesh for the repatriation of refugees after the war. She also promised stronger policing of the border and the introduction of photo identity cards. The student leaders dismissed it out of hand. In subsequent negotiations, New Delhi offered 1967 as the "cut-off date." In vain. A section of the student negotiators felt that since the government had climbed down to 1967, if they stood firm it might alight on 1951. The AASU leadership also had an eye on the calendar: if they stretched out the negotiations until they reached the eligible age to contest elections, they could reap the credit for restoring Assam's pride and securing its identity.[26]

Since the students were unwilling to melt in the pleasant sunshine of prime ministerial charisma, Indira Gandhi passed on the negotiations to the home minister and subsequently a group of ministers. These dragged on for two and a half years. The ministerial group concluded in 1983 that the issue of illegal migration was touchy for Muslims and hence it was impolitic for the government to continue parleys. To keep the AASU engaged and eventually tire them out, the negotiations were handed over to the cabinet secretary, who held with elephantine patience another sixteen rounds of meetings during Indira Gandhi's tenure.[27]

All along, the political situation in Assam was turning volatile. In December 1979, the caretaker government of Charan Singh had imposed president's rule in the state due to the absence of any stable coalition. Given the demands of the AASU and its affiliates, holding

elections in the state seemed inconceivable. In December 1980, a Congress government was sworn in—after duly orchestrating defections from the other parties—under Anwara Taimur: the first (and to date only) Muslim woman to become the chief minister of an Indian state. By reinstalling a government, Indira Gandhi was throwing the gauntlet to the ethnic Assamese movement and confuting its claim to represent the people. Taimur was an Assamese Muslim, but the student leaders responded by calling for a general strike.

The chief minister turned out a tougher customer than the prime minister had anticipated. Taimur attempted to discipline the ethnic Assamese bureaucracy and police—the more effectively to coerce the movement.[28] She aimed much too high. Inside of six months, she was asking Indira Gandhi to dissolve the state legislature and hold elections afresh. "You are being very stubborn," the prime minister said with some asperity: "this type of stubbornness . . . has created problems in Assam."[29] She imposed president's rule on the state for another six months, before a new Congress government was installed in January 1982. However, the stubborn folk of Assam ensured that this government sank within a couple of months, necessitating another bout of central rule.

As state administrations straggled along, the union government declared Assam a "disturbed area" and invoked the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act that allowed the army to use lethal force in quelling political protests. That year, 1980, the government also promulgated a national security ordinance authorizing preventive detention and promptly legislated it into the statute books. The prime minister warned the student protestors that their attempts at disrupting the flow of oil and other goods could invite retribution in kind. "Suppose other states refused to supply Assam with steel?" she asked. If states of the union refused to cooperate, the country's development would be hampered and "outside pressures will be too great to bear."[30] Soon, her government was pinning the blame on external players. Speaking in the parliament, the home minister blamed the United States and China for the troubles in Assam. His ministry claimed to possess "definite information" that the CIA was "pumping money" into northeast India through Christian missionaries.[31]

As the negotiations with AASU wore on and protests escalated, Indira Gandhi took a grim view of the situation. In early 1983, she wrote to a friend of "the terrible violence, murders, sabotage and so on of the agitators who are terrorising the rest of the population, kidnapping candidates, attacking officials." "However serious the grievance or just any demand," she continued, "how can any country be held together if such pressures are brought to bear on the Government."[32] Be that as it may, New Delhi had to conduct elections in Assam before March 1983. Under the constitutional provisions amended by the Janata government, president's rule could no longer be imposed for more than a year. Fair and acceptable elections were impossible under the prevailing conditions—unless New Delhi sued for terms with the popular movement. The other alternative was to amend the constitution to allow the extension of president's rule. Indira Gandhi's government did not have the requisite numbers in the Rajya Sabha and required the support of other opposition parties. She made a half-hearted attempt before concluding that the other parties were unwilling to play ball. Indeed, she claimed that "had the opposition parties not encouraged the agitation, I am sure a solution could have been found by now."[33]

This reading of the situation was fantastical to the point of delusion. It is not surprising that the prime minister decided to brazen it out by holding the election. The Assam movement responded with a call for blockades and strikes, as well as boycott of the polls. With government employees overtly sympathetic to them, the Assam administration struggled to organize the elections, pulling in officials from other states and clamping down aggressively on the people. Hubris was followed inevitably by nemesis. On the morning of 18 February 1983, an armed mob descended upon Nellie—a constituency populated by Bengali-speaking Muslims—and scythed through the area. This grisly massacre left between 2,000 and 8,000 men, women, and children dead. An equally gruesome attack was visited upon other areas in the vicinity of Nellie the following day, while the administration and security forces averted their eyes.[34]

"I cannot find words to describe the horror," the prime minister said when she visited Nellie three days later. Yet she insisted in parliament

that "violent opponents" of the election could not be allowed to "hold the country to ransom." An elected government in Assam would be "better able to handle the situation."[35] Her party won the election, where the percentage of voters could be counted on the fingers of a hand. But it was a Pyrrhic victory. For this fraudulent and violent exercise set the stage for continued unrest and animosity, culminating eventually in an armed insurgency in Assam.

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Soon after she returned to power, Indira Gandhi had to deal with the perennial problem of Kashmir. Her accord with Sheikh Abdullah had not survived her defeat in March 1977. As she had been voted out of office, she had instructed the Kashmir Congress unit to withdraw its support from the Sheikh Abdullah government. Indira Gandhi had been piqued by Abdullah's providing refuge to opposition figures during the Emergency and his condemnation of the police firing at Turkman Gate. Her petulance had only served to strengthen the Sheikh's position. In the elections of June 1977, the National Conference had taken forty-seven of the seventy-six assembly seats, winning forty of forty-two seats in the Valley but only seven of thirty-two in Jammu. The Janata had finished with two in the Valley and eleven in Jammu. The Congress had won eleven in Jammu but had drawn a blank in the Valley.

In power with a decisive majority, Abdullah had proceeded to assume through an ordinance wide powers for preventive detention and muzzling the press. Not only had he ignored New Delhi's suggestions for modifying this, but he had enacted in April 1978 a Public Safety Bill that had written these powers into the law.[36] The Sheikh had thus sought to maintain a constricting grip on the politics of Jammu and Kashmir.

No sooner had Indira Gandhi returned to the helm than Abdullah made some statements critical of the union government. Karan Singh, the erstwhile ruler and governor of the state who had been health minister during the Emergency before throwing in his lot with Chavan and Urs, wrote to Indira Gandhi that Abdullah had "crossed all permissible limits . . . The situation is far from satisfactory." A few months on, he told her that "the Valley is seething with secessionist and anti-Centre

feelings, to which the Sheikh himself, through his public speeches and private conversations, gives a boost from time to time."[37] In fact, Abdullah was struggling to place a lid on the bubbling unrest among Muslim youth in the Valley, which took the form of protest against the central government. Ironically, his own acceptance of the destruction of the state's autonomy in the accord with Indira Gandhi had planted disaffection.

Abdullah was also in trouble on another front. Having promised regional devolution of power in 1975, he resiled from this pledge and sought to concentrate power in Srinagar as a bulwark against the machinations of New Delhi. In 1978, Poonch erupted in protest over subregional autonomy and access to government employment. The government responded with force, leaving one student protestor dead and many injured. As the regional divide widened, the Congress party sought to secure its own hold on Jammu by branding the Sheikh a "Muslim communalist." Indira Gandhi played on this religious, communal fault line. Visiting the state in July 1981, she publicly averred that minorities in the state were feeling insecure.

The National Conference hit back with an editorial in its official weekly, *Nawa-i-Subh*. Abdullah, it claimed, had restored the "emotional integration" of the state with the union: "Now it is the centre which is reversing the process." The editorial observed that things were reaching "a point of no return." The prime minister's speech in Jammu was turning the minds of the youth towards Pakistan. A veteran Kashmir hand and former advisor, K.N. Bamzai, conveyed this as well as popular concerns about Abdullah's imminent dismissal. Bamzai agreed that the Sheikh was in his autumn but cautioned against "an erroneous impression of his being reduced to a spent force." He remained a "legendary figure," and removing him at this stage would consecrate his image as a "Martyr in defence of 'so-called Kashmir Autonomy'." Abdullah's sole desire was to secure the political future of his son, Farooq Abdullah. So, New Delhi should leave well alone.[38]

This was also the advice of the new governor of the state: the prime minister's cousin, B.K. Nehru. The Sheikh, Nehru told her, was "the strongest secular and pro-Indian force working in the State." However, Abdullah was convinced that New Delhi "wishes to remove him from

the Chief Ministership." That explained his recent "very wild utterances." All he sought was "to remain in power and to pass that power on to his son." Nehru felt that so long as Abdullah lived, they had "no option but to accept his rule." Thereafter, the situation would be entirely different. Farooq Abdullah "certainly does not have, and will not have, the kind of blind following that his father does." Besides, there would be differences within the National Conference itself. These would compel any claimant to power to parlay with New Delhi. For now, Nehru advised Indira Gandhi to talk to the Sheikh "without hurting his ego or his vanity . . . reassure him that she has no intention whatsoever of removing him unconstitutionally or destabilising his government."[39]

The prime minister agreed. Visiting Kashmir in August 1981, she assuaged Abdullah's concerns and consented to support his son Farooq's claims. As quid for the quo, she wanted Farooq to support her son Rajiv's claims to the throne in New Delhi. This dynastic succession pact held the peace for a while.[40] Although Abdullah remained at loggerheads with the central government on a plethora of issues, Indira Gandhi forbore escalating the confrontation. At Nehru's repeated urgings, she even met the Sheikh in mid-1982 and suggested that he get Farooq Abdullah—then a member of parliament—involved in his government. Abdullah was conflicted about Farooq's ability to run the party and the state, but he inducted him into the ministry in his final weeks. When Sheikh Abdullah died in harness on 8 September 1982, Farooq—supported by the state cabinet—was sworn in as interim chief minister.[41]

On the eve of the elections to the state assembly in June 1983, Indira Gandhi probed the possibility of an electoral pact with the National Conference. The latter was not particularly enthusiastic, given the manner in which the Congress had withdrawn support to their government in 1977, as well as subsequent tensions: not only between the state and central governments, but also between the National Conference and the local Congress (I) unit led by Mufti Sayeed. These tensions had been assiduously stoked by a clique in New Delhi close to the prime minister, including her political secretary M.L. Fotedar and Arun Nehru, a confidant of Rajiv Gandhi—both non-resident ethnic Kashmiris without the faintest idea of the complexities of the state's

politics. Former chief minister Mir Qasim tried negotiating an alliance with Farooq Abdullah. It came to naught. The Congress's own stance, Qasim frankly noted, had "created a climate hardly conducive to fruitful parleys on this issue."[42]

Governor Nehru reported, however, that Farooq Abdullah was still open to persuasion. The prime minister nominated Rajiv Gandhi and a seasoned congressman, K.C. Pant, to discuss with Farooq Abdullah the modalities of seat sharing. They knew that the Congress was reasonably strong in Jammu but hardly competitive in the Kashmir Valley. So, they sought at least a few safe seats in the Valley to avoid conveying the impression that there was a sharp communal divide in the state and that the Congress commanded the support only of the Hindus of Jammu. Farooq Abdullah initially seemed amenable, but after consulting his mother—who remained a force to reckon with in the National Conference—he declined to join an electoral pact.[43] An irate Indira Gandhi decided to throw herself into the campaign. "At this crucial juncture in our history," she observed, "when international forces are working for the destabilisation of India," it was incumbent on the Congress "to fight against all forces that are against the secular and democratic unity of the country."[44] This became the leitmotiv of her campaign: that the territorial integrity of India was under threat and only she could secure it. The obverse of this claim was, of course, that the National Conference was a Muslim and anti-India party.

As in Assam, Indira Gandhi invoked external threats to national unity and high principles like secularism to tar her opponents as anti-national and communal. Very like Assam, this self-serving narrative and cynical maneuver only ended up fracturing the body politic. The outcome of the election was entirely predictable. The National Conference won forty-six of seventy-five seats, all but seven of them in the Valley, and the Congress won twenty-three of thirty-two seats in Jammu and two in the Valley. Even in Jammu, the National Conference took six Muslim-majority constituencies, as opposed to three by the Congress.

The results had mapped precisely onto the regional and religious divide that the Congress leadership had apparently sought to avoid but had actually emphasized in the campaign. Yet Indira Gandhi continued

to delude herself with empty avowals of secularism. "The BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party, successor to the Jana Sangh] has been routed in Jammu," she told Mir Qasim: "Is this not a major victory for secular forces? . . . Far from harming the cause of secular and democratic forces in J&K, our strategy has strengthened it." As for the Valley, "winning or losing is not as important as it is to educate the masses politically regarding the threat to the unity and integrity of the country."[45]

Truth be told, Indira Gandhi could hardly abide Farooq Abdullah's victory. She convinced herself that the polls in the Valley had been rigged by National Conference cadres in cahoots with state officials. And she expressed her annoyance at the governor's alleged lassitude in dealing with such infractions. Qasim told her that "even the most credulous and naïve cannot be duped and deluded into believing the fantastic explanations being put forth for the debacle." But she wanted to believe them—principally because it enabled her to pressure the governor to act against the new chief minister. Before long, the prime minister's men started trooping to the governor demanding the dismissal of Farooq Abdullah. Nehru conceded that there may have been a modicum of rigging, but no more than was attempted in any election by the ruling party. Besides, there was no case to axe the chief minister.[46]

Realizing that the knives were out for him, Abdullah swiftly made for Delhi to meet the prime minister and clear the air. He told Principal Secretary Alexander that he bore the prime minister nothing but goodwill: "Farooq has not attacked and will not attack Indira Gandhi or her family in any gathering." But hell hath no fury like a prime minister scorned. Indira Gandhi refused to meet the young chief minister. As Alexander recalled, "She was in no mood to forget or forgive." A couple of weeks later, Alexander was summoned for an urgent midnight confabulation in her residence to discuss an apparent spurt of anti-national activities in the state. The meeting, which included Rajiv Gandhi, Arun Nehru, and Law Minister P. Shivshankar, concluded that if prompt action was not taken, Jammu and Kashmir would slide into anarchy and lawlessness. The meeting also affirmed that Farooq Abdullah was responsible for the situation at hand.[47]

Arun Nehru, Fotedar, and Mufti Sayeed were soon at work to engineer a split in the National Conference and topple Abdullah's

government. The chosen instrument of this ambuscade of vigilant and vindictive conspirators was Gul Mohammed Shah, son-in-law of the Sheikh, who had all along fancied his chances. Another dissident, D.D. Thakur, was tasked with suborning the governor to dismiss Farooq Abdullah. The plan was to line up, under cover of darkness, Shah and thirteen of his supporters—along with the leader of the Congress party, Mufti Sayeed—and get them to avow their withdrawal of support from Farooq, whereupon the governor would forthwith dismiss the latter and swear in Shah as chief minister. Much to their consternation, B.K. Nehru refused to partake of such skulduggery. He insisted that the chief minister's majority or lack thereof should be tested by a vote on the floor of the house.[48] By mid-September 1983, Alexander was blandly writing to the governor that *his* position was at variance with the law and precedents. Nehru replied that he would be "most grateful if you can send me . . . a precedent in which a Governor has dismissed a ministry because a majority of MLAs [members of the legislative assembly] has come to him to say—on one occasion—that they have no confidence in the government." All the precedents, including the report of the Committee of Governors of 1971, had stated that the assembly must be called at the earliest opportunity for a vote on a motion of no confidence.[49]

The pressure from New Delhi was unremitting. The governor met Indira Gandhi several times and explained why he could not dismiss his government as she wanted. The prime minister would merely insist that he do so—and forthwith. Ever-more-fanciful reasons were contrived for ridding her of the turbulent chief minister: that Farooq Abdullah was making so bold as to join a conclave of other chief ministers from opposition parties; and that he was fishing in the troubled waters of Punjab. "His purpose," Fotedar would write, "was to get the Government of India fully involved in Punjab, so that he could have an easier time running his government in Kashmir"—unwittingly conceding that New Delhi was deliberately making things difficult for his government.[50] Alexander would later claim that he "strongly felt" that it would be "very wrong and dangerous" to engineer defections and dismiss the government. Fortunately, these were his "personal" beliefs that he kept securely to himself while working officially to eject an elected government.[51]

On 20 December, Alexander informed Nehru that Shah had his fourteen men who would be presented to the governor in three days. Asked why they could not wait until the assembly convened in six weeks, Alexander replied that in four days Farooq Abdullah would take all MLAs of his party to his father's grave and administer them a solemn oath of loyalty. It is unclear whether in conveying this grim information Alexander managed to maintain a straight face. Nehru undertook to check the veracity of this outlandish claim. There was nothing to it. Nor was it clear that Shah could actually carry with him fourteen MLAs. Thakur, "after some humming and hawing and hedging," conceded that Shah had no more than four or five supporters but was trying his best to lure others. Shah himself warned the governor that his supporters would surround the official residence and demand his coronation as chief minister. In a country where crowds for hire were commonplace, Shah couldn't pull it off. On 29 December, Nehru wrote to Indira Gandhi: "I must apologize to you for my inability to fall in line with Delhi's suggestion that I should dismiss my government . . . my conscience would not permit me committing what I regard as a deliberate breach of the Constitution. I have always been, and am now, prepared to pay the penalty."[52]

Nehru thereafter prepared a note, which he handed to Alexander and the home minister, P.C. Sethi. He also discussed its contents with the prime minister in early January 1984. The note emphasized that the law-and-order situation in the state was good. If anything, the Congress party had "a programme deliberately to 'create a law and order' situation so that the Governor is forced to take over the administration." The activities of the secessionist, pro-Pakistan groups such as the Jamiat-e-Islami "continue as before, neither more nor less than normal." Gul Shah had "not had any further success in causing defections," though his "standard offer is Rs 2 Lakhs in cash plus a Ministership." Worse, "many of those contacted report straight to Farooq." Such observations were hardly calculated to please the prime minister or her coterie. On the morning of 6 January, Alexander rang Nehru asking for his resignation. The governor promptly sent it in.[53]

The prime minister was not minded to let him off the hook so easily. Summoned to Delhi two weeks later, Nehru handed over another note,

listing a series of political consequences that would ensue from the dismissal of Farooq Abdullah: "disorders throughout the valley," which would take a communal turn and require heavy repression; the arrest of Farooq would turn him into "a martyr and a hero"; no stable government could be formed and any election would have to be rigged; the "slow process of the integration of the Kashmir Muslims with India will be reversed" and "secessionist forces gain strength"; and the action would be condemned in India and abroad.[54] Indira Gandhi did not meet Nehru. But, late in the night of 23 January, he was visited by two of her grey eminences: G. Parthasarathi and T.N. Kaul. Both men, we may recall, had helped Indira Gandhi negotiate with Sheikh Abdullah. They were coming straight from an extraordinary meeting presided by her, including Defence Minister R. Venkataraman, Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee, Rajiv Gandhi, Fotedar, and that greyest of eminences, P.N. Haksar. None of the government's ministers and officials responsible for Kashmir were present. The consensus was that both Farooq Abdullah and B.K. Nehru had to go. Haksar softly clucked his demurral but to little effect.[55]

Parthasarathi and Kaul handed the governor a note asking him to instruct the chief minister to take a series of actions: ban anti-national and secessionist parties such as the Jamiat-e-Islami and imprison their leaders; tighten the security apparatus by changing the head of police, beefing up the Intelligence Bureau's presence, and checking the "flow of infiltrators in J&K from Pakistan"; deploying more central government officials in the state; and so forth. The governor should discuss this farrago of demands with the chief minister and report to the prime minister in forty-eight hours. After reading the note, Nehru told Parthasarathi and Kaul to "shove it up your own."[56]

The governor decamped to Jammu the next morning but was ordered back—with the chief minister—the same evening. Parthasarathi told Nehru that a letter was being given to Farooq Abdullah by the home minister. This was slightly more coherent than the previous one, but no less dissembling in its claims. All the changes in security and administration were apparently necessary because "the situation in our neighbourhood, especially on the Pakistan frontier is getting more threatening day by day."[57] The letter stated that the situation in Jammu

and Kashmir "cannot be ignored in the interest of national security." Secessionists were "indulging in anti-national activity with impunity." While Farooq had proclaimed his commitment to India's unity and integrity, "regrettably you have not taken necessary action to ensure this objective."[58] Hence the ultimatum presented to him.

In late March 1984, B.K. Nehru was finally dispatched as governor to Gujarat. New Delhi needed a more reliable instrument on hand. Nehru's successor was Jagmohan. The protagonist of slum demolitions during the Emergency was pressed into service for the more elevated assignment of demolishing the government of Jammu and Kashmir. The long-rehearsed script now played out to perfection. On 2 July 1984, Jagmohan sacked Abdullah on the grounds that he had lost the confidence of his party's legislators and installed Gul Shah as chief minister supported by Congress (I). B.K. Nehru's retrospective verdict on this sordid episode is worth recalling. The Kashmiris, he wrote, "were convinced now at the second dethronement of their elected ruler that India would never permit them to rule themselves . . . it was the last straw that broke the camel's back and to which the *intifada* . . . can be traced."[59]

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As in Assam and Kashmir, the problem in Punjab was spawned by the conjugation of regional identities and the desire for greater autonomy, and complicated by its location as a frontier state. Unlike them, however, Punjab had attained a measure of prosperity owing to the Green Revolution in agriculture. All these factors shaped the tortuous course of the spark that ate its way through a long historical fuse before the detonations began.

The proximate origins of the problem—we could go back to the early nineteenth century—lay in the partition of Punjab in 1947 and the subsequent quest for a Punjabi *suba*, or a separate state of Punjab, in the new Indian union. This demand was spearheaded by the main Sikh party, the Akali Dal. When the states were reorganized in the mid-1950s on linguistic principles, their demand was refused because they wanted Sikhs to be a majority in the proposed state. Jawaharlal Nehru read the demand as based on religion rather than language, and he was

unwilling to concede, for the moment, another "communal" claim in a province abutting Pakistan. The Akali Dal's subsequent agitation was brutally put down by his satrap, Pratap Singh Kairon.

In 1966, Indira Gandhi acceded to the demand for a Sikh-majority state by carving out two new states: Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. Much to the chagrin of the Akali leadership, however, the capital city of Chandigarh would be shared by Punjab and Haryana. When they mobilized popular opinion for exclusive control of Chandigarh, the prime minister agreed but also declared that Punjab should transfer to Haryana the two fertile tracts of Abohar and Fazilka.[60] The Akali Dal was unwilling to countenance this idea. In the 1967 elections, the party emerged strong enough to form a government in coalition with the Jana Sangh, which had staunchly opposed the conceding of a Sikh-majority state. This alliance of convenience proved unstable, and in 1971 Indira Gandhi's Congress (R) made short work of them.

By this time, the Green Revolution was well on its way to making Punjab the breadbasket of India, and the Akalis sought to leverage this change in the fortunes of the state to press for more. In October 1973, as the Arab–Israeli war was set to roil the global economy, the Akali leadership adopted the "Anandpur Sahib Resolution," advancing a series of demands on New Delhi: the handing over not just of Chandigarh but of other Punjabi-speaking parts of neighboring states; an increase in the recruitment of Sikhs in the Indian army; and devolution of greater powers to the states—everything barring defense, foreign relations, currency, and communications—under a new federal compact. These political demands were wrapped in a preamble that spoke of the aspirations of the Sikh nations and the primacy of the Sikh religious brotherhood, the vessel of both being the Akali Dal.[61] During the Emergency, the latter was prominent in the campaign of courting mass detention. The Akali Dal's willingness to stand up to the regime sealed its electoral victory in March 1977. When Indira Gandhi returned to power in 1980, she summarily dismissed several state governments, including the Akali government in Punjab. Before long, the Congress party was back in power in the state.

While she had been out in the cold, her loyalist in the Punjab Congress, Zail Singh—later home minister and president of India—

and her son Sanjay Gandhi had sought to sow discord and disaffection in the ranks of the Akalis. To these ends, they picked and prodded a charismatic young Sikh preacher, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.[62] By the time she was back in the saddle, Bhindranwale had unleashed sectarian strife against heterodox Sikhs and was sought to be coopted by the Akalis. His arrest in September 1981 on charge of abetting murder became a cause célèbre, triggering a rash of violence by his supporters, as well as a campaign of individual assassinations of some prominent non-Sikh Punjabis. The following month, the prime minister opened negotiations with the Akali leadership—talks that would stretch over three years. From the outset, she suspected the Akalis' bona fides. As a close aide summarized her thinking: "They [Akali Dal] were themselves in power in Punjab for three years. At that time, two ministers in the central government were from their party. But they did not do anything to solve the problem; they did not even raise it, let alone try to solve it. But as soon as I came back to power, they started the agitation. Thus, the agitation is aimed only at me."[63]

Building on the 1973 resolution, the Akali Dal initially set out a charter of forty-five demands—religious, political, economic, and social—that were soon whittled down to fifteen. The release of Bhindranwale was right on top—a request that New Delhi accepted. The Akali leadership's attitude towards the militant preacher was inflected by the desire both to prevent him from outflanking them and to use him as leverage in negotiating with New Delhi. The prime minister participated in the first three rounds of negotiations. In particular, she agreed to consider their call for reviewing the prevailing arrangement of sharing river waters between Punjab and Haryana. Intense tripartite negotiation between the union government and the two state governments led to a new agreement. But the Akalis spurned it as inimical to the interests of Punjab and embarked on a new bout of agitation.[64]

In the wake of Bhindranwale's release from custody, there was a sharp downturn in sectarian relations in Punjab. Targeted killings were now supplemented by the hijacking of commercial airliners. Bhindranwale seemed poised to take control of the Golden Temple, the holiest Sikh shrine, in Amritsar. The Akali leaders watched this with

mounting concern, even as their own agitation captured the popular imagination in Punjab. Having painted themselves into a corner, they reached out to Swaran Singh, the veteran congressman, asking him to work out a face-saving deal with Indira Gandhi. Around the same time, a young Congress MP from Punjab, Captain Amarinder Singh, offered to open an informal channel to the Akalis. This coincidence led to a series of informal meetings between the Akali leadership and representatives of the government, including two senior cabinet ministers, the cabinet secretary, and the principal secretary to the prime minister. Following hectic parleys, Swaran Singh managed to knit together an agreement that seemed acceptable to both sides. This included meeting all specifically religious demands; a commission on center–state relations and devolution of power; referring the water-sharing agreement to a tribunal appointed by the supreme court; and transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab, while deferring discussions on Abohar-Fazilka.[65]

The chief minister of Haryana, Bhajan Lal, stoutly opposed this deal. Other cabinet ministers, too, cautioned Indira Gandhi against being seen as caving in to the threat of violence in Punjab. Alexander would recall that "the prime minister quite unexpectedly agreed with these views."[66] Having resiled from the agreement, the home minister told the parliament that "in taking any decision, the Government cannot ignore the overall interest of national unity, integrity and the welfare of all sections of the people." The insinuation was that the Akali Dal's demands threatened national integrity. Adding insult to injury, he publicly asked the latter to forsake their agitation as a precondition for resuming talks.[67] Looking back, Alexander believed that the prime minister had "really missed a good chance for establishing peace."[68]

In January 1983, New Delhi resumed talks with the Akali Dal. Indira Gandhi's approach to these negotiations was to convince the Akalis that any agreement would need wider political consensus. Prior to these confabulations, she met senior opposition leaders and requested their participation. This tripartite format was designed to wear down the Akalis while holding alive the possibility of an eventual solution. The Akalis, for their part, upped the ante by wanting a review of the water-sharing agreement with the state of Rajasthan dating back to 1955. Meanwhile, the government was getting intelligence about the

accumulation of small arms and ammunition in the precincts of the Golden Temple. The militants' violence also picked up tempo, resulting in the assassination of a senior police officer in late April 1983. The Congress government in Punjab, however, hesitated to go after Bhindranwale.

By the summer of 1983, the prime minister's outlook had darkened. She took umbrage at the Akalis raising "fresh issues" and at the "violent methods and murders" espoused by the militants. Innocent lives were being lost, she held, owing to the Akali Dal's "insistence on shielding wrong doers and allowing the accumulation of arms in a religious place."[69] As ever, Indira Gandhi believed that internal flames were being fanned by external powers: in this instance, by supporting the "Khalistan" movement for an independent Punjab and providing arms and finance. In particular, she insisted that "America's short-sighted policy is doing a great deal of harm, and coming in the way of solutions which are otherwise not out of reach." The Golden Temple in Amritsar, she noted, "was swarming with American Sikhs and on all the balconies there were men with guns." Discussing the situation in Punjab, she exhorted an old colleague to understand "the interplay of domestic and international forces." More ominously, she asked: "Have you forgotten the farce enacted by the opposition parties in the name of Gandhian values?"[70] The invocation of the "JP movement" to traduce the Akalis and other parties suggested that Indira Gandhi had learnt nothing and forgotten nothing.

In mid-October 1983, the union government imposed central rule on Punjab owing to the worsening security situation. Soon after, Bhindranwale and his followers moved into the Golden Temple complex. Desultory negotiations continued between New Delhi and the Akalis through early 1984. By March, the prime minister felt that "the situation is now extremely serious. Terrorism is growing and those who are not at all committed to India or any values, seem to be gaining the upper hand." "The most unfortunate part," she insisted, "is the attitude of the Opposition parties which is irresponsible to say the least. They all encouraged the Akali Dal in their demands." She now rued having roped them into the Punjab negotiations. The opposition was "so blinded by hatred or ambition . . . that they refused to see the reality

of the situation and the dangers with which we are surrounded." She believed that "Neo-imperialism is riding high and, one by one, the smaller nations are succumbing to pressures."[71] As in the mid-1970s, this broad assessment was not off-beam; but it was pressed into service to rationalize policies and actions that she, above all, had instigated.

It was increasingly clear that the government would resort to force to break the impasse, but Indira Gandhi decided on this course only towards the end of May 1984. The prime minister instructed the army chief, General Arun S. Vaidya, to keep troops on standby for Punjab. The army's priority was to flush out the militants from the Golden Temple and other sites of worship, seize their arms, and restore normality in the state. On 25 May, the army chief briefed her on the strategy they proposed to adopt. In essence, they would cordon the Golden Temple and other sites; prevent further movement of water, food, men, and arms; and force the militants to surrender. There would be "maximum *show* of force, but minimum *use* of it." This slotted smoothly with Indira Gandhi's hope that the mere presence of the military would unnerve the militants. She emphasized that the army should avoid any damage to the temple buildings, especially the sanctum sanctorum.[72]

In an improvement on von Moltke's maxim that no plan survives contact with the enemy, the army chief's plan failed to survive contact with his own commanders. The western army commander, Lieutenant General K. Sundarji, who directly oversaw the operations, argued that a siege was unworkable in the Golden Temple complex. Contrary to the prime minister's hope, the mere presence of the troops would pull in thousands of protestors to this holiest of Sikh shrines. A swift commando operation would do the trick. Asked why the previous strategy was being discarded, Vaidya now assured the prime minister that this was the only course open to the army. She refrained from probing the wisdom of the military leadership. In so doing, Indira Gandhi walked into Operation Blue Star with her eyes wide shut.

The operation commenced in the Golden Temple complex on 5 June 1984.[73] It soon transpired that the army had grossly underestimated the number of militants, the caliber of their weapons, and the extent of their fortification. The plan was changed yet again, with tanks, armed personnel carriers, and heavy artillery being pressed into action.

By the time the guns went silent, Bhindranwale was dead and the Golden Temple was badly battered. The Sikh community, including many who detested the sectarian militants, were aghast at this extraordinary use of force at a site of worship. Adept at the game of *tu quoque*, Indira Gandhi asked her critics where their outrage had been when the Golden Temple and other shrines were being fortified with barricades and weapons.

The prime minister's mind was filled, however, with premonitory forebodings. Sikh troops in the Indian army mutinied in various locations across the country and had to be put down by force. Violence in Punjab continued unabated, including two plane hijackings after the disastrous military operation. Speaking at a huge rally in Orissa on 29 October 1984, she mused that she might not live much longer but that that did not matter to her, for her life had been given over to serving the country: "when I die every single drop of my blood will invigorate the nation and strengthen united India."[74] An ironic epitaph for a leader who had accomplished quite the opposite. Two days later, Indira Gandhi was cut down by the bullets of her Sikh bodyguards.

EPILOGUE

> There is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things.
>
> Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*

> History forms itself in such a way that the ultimate result springs always from the conflicts of many individual wills . . . as a whole unconsciously and involuntarily, because that which each individual wishes is prevented by every other, and that which results from it is a thing which no one has wished.
>
> Friedrich Engels, 1890

Around 1.30 p.m. on 31 October 1984, Indira Gandhi was formally pronounced dead. Within six hours, her son Rajiv Gandhi took oath of office as prime minister of India. This was a marked departure from established conventions and precedents, which called for the swearing in of an interim prime minister before the parliamentary party elected one: as had been done after the demise of Nehru and Shastri. By this time, however, the norms of parliamentary democracy were so many straws in the wind. In the rough passage of the long 1970s, they ceased to have collective purchase on the political order.

Then, too, Indira Gandhi had decisively reduced the Congress to a servile rump of a purged party. The acolytes who packed her cabinet

and ruled the states ensured that her plan of dynastic succession was at once implemented. Such was their disdain for established procedure that they wanted the vice president of India immediately to anoint Rajiv Gandhi—on a recommendation from the party leadership—for they were unsure whether President Zail Singh would fall in with this idea. They did not have the measure of the man. The president did not flinch from his duty to the deceased prime minister, rationalizing it as imperative for political stability in an hour of peril.[1]

Next morning, Indira Gandhi's body was laid in state at her father's old residence. As mourners queued up in the thousands to pay their respects, a clamor rose from the anguished and angry crowd: "*khoon ka badla khoon*" ("blood must be avenged by blood"). There had been some sporadic violence across Delhi in the previous night. Over the next two days, a pogrom was unloosed on the Sikh populace of the city: slaughtering and burning innocents, vandalizing their homes and offices, desecrating their shrines and scriptures. This was no "spontaneous" riot. Rather, Congress politicians led and channeled the mobs. The central government desisted from deploying the ample security forces at its disposal, even as the capital city heaved in flame and smoke. The home minister and Indira loyalist, P.V. Narasimha Rao, made himself scarce through these days. Sikhs were also the target of attacks in other cities, though wherever the administration took a firm hand the violence was curbed. By the time this thirst for revenge was slaked, over 3,000 Sikhs had perished—most of them in the national capital. The new prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, shuffled off any responsibility, saying, "When a big tree falls, the earth shakes." Unsurprisingly, there was no political or judicial accountability for this planned massacre.[2] To be sure, Congress leaders and workers had been complicit in many instances of organized violence against minorities during Indira Gandhi's reign—from Ahmedabad in 1969 to Moradabad in 1980. Still, the Sikh pogrom stood out against this bloody backcloth.

In the wake of his mother's assassination and the grisly violence against the Sikhs, Rajiv Gandhi racked up the greatest electoral victory in the history of Indian democracy. The cocktail of sympathy for his loss and antipathy towards a minority community proved irresistible. In the general elections of December 1984, the Congress (I) took 404

of 514 seats in the Lok Sabha, adding later another 10 to its tally. The Janata Party counted 10 seats, while the new avatar of the Jana Sangh, the BJP, slumped to a mere 2 seats in parliament. Some regional parties fared better. N.T. Rama Rao's Telugu Desam held Andhra Pradesh, while the CPI (M) retained its hold on West Bengal. Yet it was hardly a balm with which to medicate the disaster for the opposition. This was the final, posthumous lap of Indira Gandhi's electoral Caesarism and acclamation. As a contemporary observer perceptively noted, "It was the last election, or referendum, she won for the Congress—most decisively and most tragically."[3]

This crushing majority was squandered by Rajiv Gandhi—a political naïf who failed to survive his novitiate. Glittering genes could get him only so far. It was, as Indira's Alice might have said, a grin without a cat. Rajiv Gandhi's historic role was to draw the curtains on the long 1970s. What followed was a new phase in Indian politics with its own variant of the crisis of representation. Charismatic Caesarism gave way to a prolonged bout of coalition politics. There was a surge of new social groups, political parties, and leaders in the democratic arena. But there was no turning back to the prim parliamentary politics of the Nehruvian age.

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That inaugural phase of Indian democracy should not, however, be idealized. At the time, parliamentary politics could be played by the rules of the game largely because the game was not competitive. The Congress party's dominance at each rung of politics was matched by relatively low levels of electoral participation and political literacy. All that changed utterly in the long 1970s.

The crisis of representation underscored by the Congress's drab performance in the 1967 elections, as well as Indira Gandhi's response to it, resulted in an extraordinary and unprecedented shift in relative institutional power towards the executive, especially the prime minister. In splitting the grand old party and plumping for early elections, she took calculated yet risky decisions—for none could have foreseen the resounding victory of her party in the polls. The dramatic outcome of the Bangladesh crisis was yet more uncertain and unpredictable—not least because of the United States' patronage of the Pakistani military

regime. Having swept the opposition aside in the subsequent state elections of 1972, the prime minister proceeded to tame the higher judiciary. Indira Gandhi's efforts during the Emergency to entrench executive power by altering the constitution were partly undone by the Janata government. Yet, in her final term in office, she reasserted the powers of the central executive, especially against the states.

Concurrent with these shifts were changes in the collective expectations and beliefs of political actors across the spectrum of parties about the rules of the game of parliamentary democracy. As elections grew ever more competitive from 1967 onwards, these rules, norms, and procedures were increasingly breached by the political elite. After the elections of 1971–72, both the opposition and ruling party regarded these as constraints that should be sliced away. The global economic crisis and its devastating impact on India blew aside any residual restraint, paving the way for a decisive confrontation that ended in the Emergency. After the Congress party's defeat and Indira Gandhi's ouster, the Janata government continued to erode the rules of the game. She repaid them in their own coin on returning to power.

Indira Gandhi's Caesarist mode of politics helped her surmount the crisis of representation— but only up to a point. Charisma and popular acclamation proved volatile and evanescent and certainly incapable of being passed on to her successor. The corollary to this Caesarist mode was the disembowelling of the Congress party, a development that led inexorably to a dynastic succession in leadership.

In the long 1970s, Indian democracy turned into a terrible beauty: terrible in its unheeding will to power; yet beautiful in its ability to precipitate the passions of millions, especially the poor. The Emergency, far from being the "masterstroke of the state" that Indira Gandhi had envisaged, ended up branding the importance of electoral democracy more deeply into popular consciousness. Her preference for coercion over persuasion in coping with the crisis of hegemony had the ironic consequence of entrenching a principal mechanism of eliciting consent: the ideology of popular sovereignty. Elections were important because the rulers could be reduced to the ranks.

These years also saw a major shift in the state's efforts at securing the material bases of consent. The developmental state of the Nehruvian

era was supplanted by a new ensemble of governmental rationality, informed by expert knowledge on poverty and population, enabled by a major reconfiguration of the state's fiscal-monetary architecture, and resulting in a suite of targeted programs and policies for poverty alleviation. The new governmental rationality also included a different approach to managing the economy by deregulation of economic controls, business-friendly orientation, and conservative macroeconomic policies. This important shift was, ironically, the consequence of a lurch towards greater dirigisme in the pursuit of "socialist" policies.

Some of these changes have proved more lasting than others. The Congress was eventually incapable of overcoming the crisis of representation, and the polity entered an era of coalitions. The model of dynastic politics that crystallized in the Congress not only endured but was adopted by a range of regional parties. The Caesarist mode of charismatic politics did not survive Indira Gandhi, though it has arguably had a second coming in recent years.

The imprint of the long 1970s was most pronounced in political economy. The economic policies pursued by successive governments from the mid-1970s paved the way for the liberalizing reforms and opening up of the Indian economy in the early 1990s. Similarly, Indira Gandhi's last term in office pushed the economy on a higher growth trajectory averaging 6 per cent—a figure that would continue to the end of the century. It would be hasty and incorrect to label her later economic policies as "neoliberal," though the bearings were initially set in her time. A further fork was needed in the Brechtian crooked line to reach the appointed end. By 1985, the pips had been squeezed out of the fiscal-monetary apparatus. So, the government took to borrowing on international capital markets—a trend that turned the next balance of payments crisis into the terminal one. The hour of full-throated liberalization had finally arrived.

The anti-poverty policies espoused by Indira Gandhi decisively shaped the Indian state's imagination. The focus of these policies, the mechanisms of targeting, the modes of financing, and the techniques of delivery—all have evolved and expanded tremendously since the long 1970s. Their pervasive presence at every level of Indian politics—local, state, national—can be picked up at a glance from any day's news.

These "welfare" schemes aimed at the poor have become the heart of a heartless polity: the opioids of Indian democracy.

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Four decades after her passing, the popular memory of Indira Gandhi is a bricolage of her "socialist" policies and concern for the poor; her steely handling of the Bangladesh crisis; her dictatorial rule during the Emergency; and her courage all the way through, including in the face of her eventual assassination. Both critics and admirers see her as a Machiavellian figure—the former as ruthless and insatiable in the pursuit of power; the latter as bold and tenacious in ushering in a new order.

"How strange is life," Indira Gandhi wrote towards the end of hers: "What is real and what of our imagination or making? . . . how true is the picture we have of any person or happening?"[4] The image of ruthlessness was one she cultivated after her apprenticeship in a patriarchal party and gendered political arena. Her reputation for audacity, too, tended to conceal the tentativeness and insecurity that at times marked her choices. She seldom doubted the rectitude and sincerity of her actions—qualities that enabled her to react with fortitude when her hopes failed and her calculations were upset. Nor was there any doubt about the depth of her commitment to India. In a testament written weeks before her assassination, she wrote, "A poet has written of his 'love'—'how can I feel humble with the wealth of you beside me!' I can say the same of India."[5]

Yet the historian cannot rest the case by reviving the echoes of the past and revealing with pale gleams the passions of times gone by. For the intentions and ambitions of a political actor do not always—in fact, rarely—determine events and outcomes. Indeed, when confronted with novel situations, political actors rifle through the past for its familiar vocabulary and ideas: "The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living."[6]

Indira Gandhi set out to master the crisis of the old order by restoring it to the foundational ideas of the Nehruvian age. What she accomplished, however, was a set of deep transformations: in the political system, the mode of politics, and political economy. Then, too, her

consistently avowed desire to strengthen India ignited a train of crises that would culminate in armed insurgencies. Hence, Engels' point about the involuntary workings of history. Hence, too, the importance of grasping the broad context in which political actors try to bend the arc of history, and of judging the consequences flowing from their deeds and misdeeds.

In his scintillating study of the first Caesarist politician of modern France, Louis Bonaparte, Marx wrote that he wished to show how it was "possible for a grotesque mediocrity to play a hero's part."[7] Indira Gandhi was no mediocrity; nor did she perform a heroic role. Yet the historical changes wrought in her time certainly paved the way for some grotesque mediocrities to rule India.

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

August 1947	Partition and independence of India.
August 1947–January 1950	Accession and integration of the princely states to the Indian union.
October 1947	Conflict with Pakistan over Jammu and Kashmir begins.
January 1950	Constitution of India promulgated.
March 1950	Planning Commission established.
October 1951–February 1952	First general elections and state assembly elections.
1951	First five-year plan announced (1951–56).
1953	Dismissal and arrest of Sheikh Abdullah, premier of Jammu and Kashmir.
1956	Second five-year plan (1956–61) and Industrial Policy Resolution announced.
February–March 1957	Second general elections and state assembly elections; formation of CPI government in Kerala.
1959–60	Indira Gandhi serves as president of Indian National Congress.
July 1959	Nehru government dismisses CPI ministry in Kerala.
1961	Third five-year plan (1961–66).
October–November 1962	India–China war.
1963	Kamaraj Plan leading to resignation of senior cabinet ministers and Congress chief ministers.
April 1964	The Monopolies Inquiry Commission set up. Report published in 1965.
27 May 1964	Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru dies.
October 1964	Bernard Bell, head of the World Bank Mission to India, submits report on the Indian economy.
August–September 1965	India–Pakistan war.
11 January 1966	Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri dies.

24 January 1966	Indira Gandhi takes over as prime minister.
March 1966	Indira Gandhi visits the United States.
June 1966	Government announces devaluation of Indian rupee.
September 1966	Punjab Reorganisation Act of 1966, leading to the formation of two states, Punjab and Haryana.
1966–67	Floods and famine in Bihar.
February 1967	Fourth general elections and state assembly elections. Setback for Congress party.
May 1967	The outbreak of the Naxalbari uprising, West Bengal.
October 1967	Indira Gandhi begins outreach to Sheikh Abdullah.
1968	Non-Congress coalition governments in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh fall apart.
July 1969	Indira Gandhi nationalizes fourteen private banks.
November 1969	Indian National Congress splits into Congress (O) and Congress (R). Indira Gandhi returns as prime minister of Congress (R) government without a majority in parliament.
December 1969	The Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act comes into effect.
February 1970	Supreme court strikes down bank nationalization. Major changes introduced, tightening the industrial licensing policy.
September 1970	Government "derecognizes" former princely rulers and removes their privy purses via presidential order.
December 1970	Supreme court strikes down presidential order on princes. Indira Gandhi dissolves Lok Sabha and announces early election.
February–March 1971	Fifth general elections. Indira Gandhi returns as prime minister with a clear majority.
March–December 1971	Bangladesh crisis and war.
August 1971	Twenty-fourth Amendment to the Constitution, enabling parliament to amend constitution, including fundamental rights. United States stops dollar–gold convertibility.
December 1971	Twenty-fifth Amendment circumscribes right to property; Twenty-sixth Amendment abolishes privy purses of the princes.
March 1972	State assembly elections.
June 1972	Indira Gandhi meets Sheikh Abdullah, and formal negotiations begin.
July 1972	Shimla agreement signed between India and Pakistan.
March 1973	Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates abandoned.
April 1973	Wholesale trade in wheat nationalized. Supreme court judgment on Kesavananda Bharati, affirming the "basic structure" doctrine.
September 1973	Foreign Exchange Regulation Act comes into effect.
December 1973	OPEC hikes oil prices, triggering inflation globally and in India.
1974	Fifth five-year plan (1974–79).
April 1974	India seeks IMF's assistance to improve balance-of-payments position.
May 1974	National strike by employee unions of the Indian Railways. India conducts its first nuclear test.
July 1974	Government uses ordinances to impose anti-inflation measures.

1974–75	Student movements in Gujarat and Bihar, and Navnirman movement under Jayaprakash Narayan.
February 1975	Indira Gandhi and Sheikh Abdullah conclude Kashmir Accord.
12 June 1975	The Allahabad high court passes a judgment finding Indira Gandhi guilty of electoral malpractices and disqualifying her from office for six years.
25 June 1975	Emergency declared.
August 1976	The Swaran Singh committee on amending the constitution.
December 1976	Forty-second Amendment bill signed into law.
January 1977	Indira Gandhi announces elections. Opposition leaders released from prison and form Janata Party.
March 1977	Sixth general elections won by Janata; Emergency revoked.
May 1977	Shah Commission established to inquire into Emergency. Report submitted in August 1978.
June 1977	Congress state governments dismissed and elections held to several state legislatures.
October 1977	Indira Gandhi arrested by the CBI and released.
January 1978	Indira Gandhi splits Indira Gandhi Congress (R) to form the Congress (I).
November 1978	Indira Gandhi wins Lok Sabha by-election in Chikmagalur constituency.
December 1978	Forty-fourth Amendment bill enacted by Janata government to reverse some of the constitutional changes made by the Forty-second Amendment.
July 1979	Morarji Desai resigns as prime minister of Janata government. Charan Singh invited to form government.
August 1979	Charan Singh resigns as prime minister ahead of confidence vote.
January 1980	Seventh general elections. Congress (I) wins majority, and Indira Gandhi returns as prime minister.
February 1980	Indira Gandhi dissolves all non-Congress governments in states, and fresh elections held.
June 1980	Sanjay Gandhi dies in plane crash.
December 1980	Congress (I) government formed in Assam while union government negotiated with the AASU.
1981	Sixth five-year plan (1981–86).
October 1981	Indira Gandhi meets Ronald Reagan in Cancun.
September 1982	Sheikh Abdullah dies. Farooq Abdullah becomes interim chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir.
January 1983	Congress (I) loses state elections in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.
February 1983	Election in Assam triggers massive ethnic violence in Nellie and other areas.
October 1983	Farooq Abdullah becomes chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir after winning elections.
June 1984	Operation Blue Star conducted by Indian army to remove Sikh insurgents from the Golden Temple in Amritsar.
July 1984	Farooq Abdullah dismissed as chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir.
31 October 1984	Indira Gandhi assassinated in New Delhi. Rajiv Gandhi becomes prime minister of India. Pogrom against Sikhs starts in Delhi and elsewhere.

NOTES

PROLOGUE: CRISIS OF THE OLD ORDER

1. Katherine Frank, *Indira: The Life of Indira Nehru Gandhi* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), p. 284.
2. Sarvepalli Gopal, *Radhakrishnan: A Biography* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 345.
3. Inder Malhotra, *Indira Gandhi: A Personal and Political Biography* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989), p. 88.
4. V.P. Menon, *The Story of the Integration of Indian States* (London: Longmans Green, 1956). For the key episodes, see Srinath Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India: A Strategic History of the Nehru Years* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 27–148.
5. The classic account remains Granville Austin, *The Indian Constitution: The Cornerstone of a Nation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966). For more recent treatments, see Madhav Khosla, *India's Founding Moment: The Constitution of a Most Surprising Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020); Sandipto Dasgupta, *Legalizing the Revolution: India and the Constitution of the Postcolony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024).
   Also see Rohit De, *The People's Constitution: The Everyday Life of Law in the Indian Republic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).
6. The best short account is Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1997). For an indispensable collection of analytical and theoretical reflections, see Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Trajectories of the Indian State: Politics and Ideas* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2010); Idem, *The Enchantment of Democracy in India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2011).
7. Sudipta Kaviraj, "An Outline of a Revisionist Theory of Modernity," *European Journal of Sociology*, 46:3 (December 2005), pp. 497–526.
8. Benjamin Zachariah, *Developing India: An Intellectual and Social History c. 1930–1950* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005); Raghabendra Chattopadhyaya, "The Idea of Planning in India, 1930–1951" (PhD Thesis, Australian National University, 1985); Srinath Raghavan, *India's War: The Making of Modern South Asia* (London: Allen Lane, 2016).

9. Francine Frankel, *India's Political Economy: The Gradual Revolution*, 2nd edn (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005); A.H. Hanson, *The Process of Planning: A Study of India's Five-year Plans 1950–64* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966). For a recent account, see Nikhil Menon, *Planning Democracy: Modern India's Quest for Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).
10. The classic treatment is Sukhamoy Chakravarty, *Development Planning: The Indian Experience* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998). Also see Jagdish Bhagwati and Padma Desai, *India: Planning for Industrialization* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970). On food, Benjamin Siegel, *Hungry Nation: Food, Famine, and the Making of Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
11. Frankel, *India's Political Economy*, pp. 150, and 185.
12. This "primitive accumulation of capital" has been emphasized in Kalyan Sanyal's important book, *Rethinking Capitalist Development: Primitive Accumulation, Governmentality and Post-colonial Capitalism* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2007). The concept is, of course, from Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. I (London: Pelican, 1976), ch. 26.
13. Jan Breman's large oeuvre is central to understanding these processes. See, especially, *Patronage and Exploitation: Changing Agrarian Relations in South Gujarat, India* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974); *Of Peasants, Migrants and Paupers: Rural Labour Circulation and Capitalist Production in West India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985); *Footloose Labour: Working in India's Informal Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); *At Work in the Informal Economy of India: A Perspective from the Bottom Up* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013).
14. Charan Singh, *Joint Farming X-rayed: The Problem and its Solution* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1959).
15. Aditya Balasubramanian, *Toward a Free Economy: Swatantra and Opposition Politics in Democratic India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023).
16. Rajni Kothari, *Politics in India* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1970).
17. Reinhart Koselleck, "Crisis," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 67:2 (April 2006), pp. 357–99.
18. Drawing on Gramsci's fragmentary notes, Ranajit Guha famously argued that the colonial state was a dominance without hegemony: the element of coercion always exceeded that of persuasion. Without a comparable historical demonstration, however, he insisted that the postcolonial state, too, was a dominance without hegemony. Partha Chatterjee and Sudipta Kaviraj would advance a similar argument drawing on another idea of Gramsci's: passive revolution. In postcolonial India, no single class could establish its hegemony. Instead, state power was shared by a coalition of dominant classes: the landed elites, the capitalists, and the bureaucratic-managerial elites. Pranab Bardhan used a similar framework to explain the political economy of postcolonial India. These accounts share some key assumptions. Following Gramsci, hegemony is seen principally as a mode of social power that dominant classes seek to exercise in the domain of civil society. This overlooks the political role of the state in establishing hegemony, as well as the principal mechanism for eliciting consent: parliamentary representative democracy with universal suffrage based on the ideology—not fiction—of popular sovereignty. Consent here is premised on the popular belief that the people exercise self-determination. No hegemony is ever complete, or consent

always assured. But it is important to distinguish between various periods when hegemony has waxed or waned. Ranajit Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Idem, *Small Voice of History: Collected Essays* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2009), pp. 368–70; Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London: Zed Books, 1986); Idem, *The Nation and its Fragments* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); Kaviraj, *Trajectories of the Indian State*, ch. 4; Pranab Bardhan, *The Political Economy of Development in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984).

19. For an intellectual history of the relationship between the ideology of popular sovereignty and development, see Nazmul Sultan, *Waiting for the People: The Idea of Democracy in Indian Anticolonial Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2024).
20. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2009), p. 210.
21. Sunil Khilnani, "States of Emergency," *The New Republic* (17 December 2001), p. 41.
22. Indira to Jawaharlal Nehru, 3 October 1932, in Sonia Gandhi (ed.), *Freedom's Daughter: Letters Between Indira Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru 1922–39* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989), p. 55.
23. Indira to Nehru, 21 January 1938, ibid., p. 361.
24. Indira to Nehru, 21 September 1938, ibid., p. 400.
25. Indira Gandhi to Dorothy Norman, 31 May 1955, in Dorothy Norman (ed.), *Indira Gandhi: Letters to an American Friend 1950–1984* (New York: Harcourt Brace Janovich, 1985), p. 27.
26. Indira to Nehru, 23 April 1956, in Sonia Gandhi (ed.), *Two Along, Two Together: Letters Between Indira Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru 1940–1964* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992), pp. 614–15.
27. Cited in Khilnani, *The Idea of India*, p. 47.
28. Indira to Nehru, 30 October 1959, in Gandhi (ed.), *Two Along, Two Together*, pp. 627–8.
29. Indira Gandhi to P.N. Haksar, 21 February 1966 and 2 February 1971, Correspondences—Indira Gandhi, P.N. Haksar Papers, PMML.
30. Indira Gandhi to Dorothy Norman, 14 September 1980, in Norman (ed.), *Letters to an American Friend*, p. 154.
31. P.N. Dhar, *Indira Gandhi, the "Emergency" and Indian Democracy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 123.
32. Indira to Nehru, 30 October 1959, in Gandhi (ed.), *Two Along, Two Together*, p. 627.
33. Christophe Jaffrelot and Pratinav Anil, *India's First Dictatorship* (London: Hurst, 2020).
34. Gyan Prakash, *Emergency Chronicles: Indira Gandhi and Democracy's Turning Point* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019). Also see Arvind Rajagopal's review and Gyan Prakash's rejoinder in *Economic and Political Weekly* (1 June 2019 and 22 June 2019).
35. Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (London: Picador, 2008).
36. Jairam Ramesh, *Intertwined Lives: P.N. Haksar and Indira Gandhi* (New Delhi: Simon & Schuster, 2018).

37. For an earlier formulation, see Srinath Raghavan, "Decoding the Emergency," *Seminar*, 677 (January 2016), available online at https://www.india-seminar.com/2016/677/677_srinath_raghavan.htm. The idea of a "long 1970s" is also used in Odd Arne Westad and Chen Jian, *The Great Transformation: China's Road from Revolution to Reform* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2024). I am grateful to Arne Westad for discussions on this periodization.
38. Michael J. Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington, and Joji Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission* (New York: New York University Press, 1975); Jürgen Habermas, *The Legitimation Crisis* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1976).
39. Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence* (London: Verso, 2006).
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